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# **BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN IRELAND**

**A Marxist Historical Analysis**

**BY  
ELINOR BURNS**



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# **British Imperialism in Ireland**

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**ELINOR BURNS.**

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## CONTENTS.

Chapter	Page
I The English Invasion .....	1
II The Land War: First Stage .....	10
III The Land War: Second Stage .....	20
IV The Industrial Struggle .....	32
V Sinn Fein and the Class Struggle .....	42
VI Towards a Workers' and Peasants' Republic	55

## INTRODUCTION

Elinor Burns's fearless exposures of British imperialism in China, Egypt, West Africa, etc., are well-known to English-speaking workers.

The present booklet, analysing as it does the long and bitter record of class antagonisms in Ireland, will prove an invaluable guide to the thousands of struggling Irish workers and farmers who, at the moment, find themselves at a loss to explain the forces that oppress them.

Not since the appearance of Connolly's "Labour in Irish History" has the vexed question of "who are the real enemies?" been approached from a scientific, that is to say, a *class* angle, and Comrade Burns's compact survey of Irish history in its relation to world politics clearly proves that the same forces are operating in Ireland as are remoulding the whole fabric of society in the world to-day.

WORKERS' BOOKS,

*March, 1931.*

## CHAPTER I.

## THE BRITISH INVASION.

Ireland has nearly twenty million acres of fertile land and a climate in which agricultural production is easy and abundant. It is the western outpost of Europe, and its closeness to Great Britain gives it great strategic significance in conflicts with Britain's enemies. The desire to exploit Ireland's agricultural wealth, and to prevent the country from becoming a base for a rival power, appears at every stage of England's relations with Ireland as a dominating interest of Britain's ruling class.

The early attempts of the English to conquer Ireland gradually destroyed the existing tribal form of society, based on common ownership of the land, and brought the country under feudal control, reducing the clansmen to the condition of serfs who worked on the land for the feudal lord. Tribal life survived longest in the north-east, and it was here that the most determined resistance to the English invaders was maintained.

When the tribal chiefs of Ulster were defeated in the early seventeenth century, the whole of the land was confiscated to the English Crown, and the English Government proceeded to expel the Irish landholders from Ulster and to hand over estates to British groups (known as "undertakers") and individuals. Tracts of 1,000 to 2,000 acres were offered to Scotch and English undertakers, at nominal rents, to be paid to the English Crown. The undertakers had to promise to clear out the native population and to take as tenants English and Scotch settlers only. The native Irish themselves were eligible only for the smallest group of holdings, and had to pay rents twice as high as the rents paid by the undertakers. All the rest of the Irish inhabitants of Ulster, apart from certain selected tenants and landholders, were to be evicted by a given date. This was the scheme for the plantation (colonisation) of Ulster, which was to turn it into a stronghold of English interests.

The County of Derry, afterwards called Londonderry, was handed over to a group of London companies, including the Goldsmiths, Clothworkers, Ironmongers, Vintners and others, and a certain Sir Thomas Phillips was appointed governor of the County, to supervise its fortification and colonisation by the companies. Phillips drew up a scheme for "the present reformation and safety" of Ireland, which might have served as a model to the British Government in Africa at the present

day. All the Irish inhabitants on any estate were to be "booked" (registered, as under the Native Registration Act in South Africa). All persons not so booked were liable to arrest as "idle persons," and an armed guard was to be established on all estates, whose duty it would be to pursue any idle person who attempted to escape and "to follow them altogether till they are taken." (In East and South Africa, any African who is found outside his reserve without a pass is liable to arrest as a criminal.) No Irishman might move from one place to another without a magistrate's certificate. All the Irish were to be disarmed. (Londonderry and the London Companies, pp. 58-61.)

In spite of threats that their land would be forfeited, some of the settlers continued to keep a certain number of the expropriated Irish as tenants on their former holdings. Those who thus remained kept in touch with the thousands of evicted families, who had been driven into the hills and woods, and lived in a state of desperate poverty. In 1641 a great rising broke out, supported by nearly all the dispossessed clans, against the invaders who had robbed them of their lands. Terrible stories of the massacre of Protestants were told in England, and one punitive expedition after another was sent to crush the rebellion, which spread through the whole country. English and Scotch troops were brought over, with orders to give no quarter but to slaughter all inhabitants capable of bearing arms and to burn to the ground all places where they received shelter. An English officer gave orders for the massacre of Irish children because "Nits will be lice." (Prendergast, Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland.)

Fighting continued in Ireland during the whole period of the Civil War in England, and both sides used promises of land in Ireland in order to raise money and soldiers to carry on the struggle. In 1649 Cromwell landed in Ireland with an army to complete the subjection of the country, and the process of extermination and confiscation was carried on with even greater brutality than before. When Cromwell arrived in Dublin he promised rewards to all who supported him "against the barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish and all their adherents and confederates." Religious feeling was used to intensify the violence of the struggle. At the siege of Drogheda, thirty thousand Catholics, many of them English, were slaughtered. Thousands of Irish, including women and children, were sold as slaves and sent to the West Indies. After the siege of Drogheda, Cromwell reported:

every tenth man of the soldiers killed, and the rest shipped for the Barbadoes.



In 1641 the population of Ireland was estimated at 1½ million. In 1652, after ten years of war, and the famine and plague that followed, it had fallen to 850,000, of whom 150,000 were English and Scotch. (*Encyclopaedia-Britannica*. Ireland).

The confiscation of land under Cromwell was carried out on a scale which affected nearly the whole country. His plan was to expel the whole Catholic Irish population from Ulster, Munster and Leinster, and to confine them to the province of Connaught. All persons who had taken part in or abetted the rebellion, except certain Protestants and women who had married English Protestants, were to remove across the Shannon by May 1st, 1654. Those who were found east of the Shannon after the appointed day were to be treated as hostile spies, tried by martial law, and suffer death. (Bagwell, *Ireland Under the Stuarts*. II 324-5.) Some 40,000 survivors of the Irish army were sent into exile abroad, so that the Irish had no armed forces.

Large numbers of new settlers, many of them former soldiers in Cromwell's armies, were brought over and given land in Ireland. But the same influences that had prevented the complete expulsion of the Irish population of Ulster during the first plantations now made it impossible to enforce Cromwell's scheme. The settlers wanted the Irish to work for them. It became necessary, therefore, to ensure that, while the Irish must remain as labourers on the land, it should be impossible for them to secure any economic or political control which they might use to support the enemies of the new ruling class in England. The danger of such support was clear when Ireland became the rallying ground for the final resistance to the English revolution of 1689. At the battle of Aughrim on July 12, 1691, the Catholic forces which were supporting the restoration of the Stuart monarchy were defeated by the troops of William of Orange. July 12, the anniversary of this English bourgeois victory, is still celebrated by Orangemen in Ulster.

To safeguard their success the English Government passed a series of Penal Laws, based on the fact that the majority of the Irish were Catholics. By these measures members of the Roman Catholic Church were deprived of all economic and political power. They could not own land, or take land on lease for more than thirty years; if they became traders or manufacturers they had to pay a special tax and might not employ more than two apprentices; they were disqualified from voting in elections or holding any public office; they were

were handed over to the Anglican Protestant Church and increased by the addition of confiscated estates. According to a contemporary account

The people of Ireland are all in factions and parties, called English and Irish, Protestants and Papists; though, indeed, the real distinction is vested and divested of the land.

(Petty, *Political Anatomy of Ireland*, 1691.)

By the end of the 17th century a strong centre of British power had been established in Ulster, and the native Irish had been deprived, partly by direct economic restrictions and partly under the guise of religious exclusion, of the ownership of land and the development of industry.

The colonisation of Ulster has its modern counterpart in the Zionist Settlement of Palestine. A people of alien race and religion were brought in, as agents of British interests, in order to establish a section of the population which, on the whole, could be relied on to support the British against the native population. As in Palestine the earlier Jewish colonists had lived for years on friendly terms with the Arabs, so in Ireland the old Anglo-Irish population lived among the native Irish; but in both countries the expropriation of the natives in favour of the new settlers led to bitter resentment, and religious and racial conflicts were fomented by the British in order to direct this resentment against the settlers and to prevent it from developing into a direct struggle against the British ruling class.

Many of the soldiers and other colonists who had settled in Ireland under Cromwell's plantation scheme became sheep and cattle farmers, and trade in live stock developed with extraordinary rapidity. Within fifteen years of Cromwell's invasion a yearly average of 50,000 head of cattle was being exported to England. At this stage the economic policy, which was characteristic of English interests in the whole early capitalist period, began to be enforced in Ireland. The rapidly expanding live stock trade from Ireland led to a fall in agricultural prices and rents in England. An Act was, therefore, passed in the English Parliament (1666) totally prohibiting all exports to England of live animals for food, meat, bacon and dairy products. The Irish livestock trade was wiped out in a few months, and the possibility of developing a provision trade with England was destroyed.

In Ireland the results of this prohibition were twofold. First, the closing of trade with England led to a growing export trade in meat and other salted food to foreign countries prohibited from carrying arms, and all assemblies for public worship were prohibited. The whole of the church revenues

and the colonies, involving an increase in Irish shipping. It is to be noted that within a few years of the passing of the Cattle Act, when transport was in its infancy, England's share of Ireland's foreign trade was only 25 per cent.; and it was only by further interventions of the English Government that Irish exports, first to the colonies and afterwards to foreign countries, were suppressed.

The second immediate effect of the Cattle Act was an increase in the breeding of sheep and the export of wool. The woollen trade, which had now become England's staple industry, found in Ireland a source of cheap raw material. An Act was accordingly passed which made it a felony to export wool from Ireland to any country except England, and prohibited (on pain of confiscation) export to England of any but raw wool. These restrictions in turn led to the revival of woollen manufacture in Ireland for the home market and for export abroad.

A picture of the general economic condition of Ireland in this period, before English interests destroyed the woollen industry and broke up Ireland's foreign trade, was given by an Englishman, Sir William Petty, who for the first time attempted an economic survey of Ireland. He was mainly concerned, on behalf of the English Government, in showing how Ireland could be made into a revenue-producing province of England; but his figures reveal the terrible conditions in which the great majority of the Irish population lived, and make it clear that the proceeds of trade and manufacture were going into the hands of one small section, most of whom were separated from the mass of the population by race and religion as well as by class interests.

Twenty years after Cromwell's subjection of Ireland, Petty found that the population consisted of 800,000 Irish and 300,000 English and Scotch. The Protestant settlers who, after all attempts to exterminate the Irish, still formed only a little more than a quarter of the total inhabitants, owned

threequarters of all the lands; five-sixths of all the housing; nine-tenths of all the housing in walled towns and places of strength; two-thirds of foreign trade.

(*Political Anatomy of Ireland*, pages 11-13).

Threequarters of the Irish population lived in a state of extreme poverty, in cabins which had neither chimney, door, nor window—

Men live in such cottages as themselves can build in 3 or 4 days; eat such food (tobacco excepted) as they buy not from others; wear such clothes as the wool of their own sheep, spun into yarn by themselves, doth make. (Page 76.)

Potatoes and milk had already become the chief diet of

the peasants, and Petty estimated that for a family of six, food cost a penny a day per head. Of the working population, which he put at about three-quarters of a million, 120,000 were employed in cattle and sheep tending, 100,000 in corn growing, and 75,000 in wool and cloth making.

The low standard of living of Irish peasants and workers meant that raw wool and woollen textiles were very cheap. Manufacturers in the West of England began to complain that their woollen goods were undersold in foreign markets by Irish products, and petitions were sent to the English Parliament protesting against Irish competition. The woollen manufacturers of Taunton declared that their trade was being destroyed—

by reason of the great growth of the woollen manufactory in Ireland; the great demands they have for the same from Holland, New England, and other parts, which used to be supplied by England; the vast numbers of our workmen who go hither; the cheapness of wool and provisions there, and the decay of trade here. (Murray—*History of Commercial Relations Between England and Ireland*, p. 53).

In the last years of the 17th century the woollen trade in Ireland was employing 42,000 Protestant families and a considerable number of Irish Catholics, and the Commissioners of Trade and Plantations reported that the woollen trade of Ireland could not continue without injuring the English industry. It was proposed, therefore, to suppress the Irish woollen trade and in its place to develop the linen industry, which would not interfere with English interests. The English Parliament, therefore, passed an Act directly prohibiting all exports from Ireland of goods made or mixed with wool, except to England; and the duties on manufactures exported to England were maintained.

Thus the Irish woollen trade, like the livestock trade, was destroyed by English interests. For many years an illicit trade with France was carried on, and very large quantities of raw wool were smuggled out of Ireland, while large numbers of Irish weavers, thrown out of work in Ireland, emigrated to European countries and were employed by the foreign competitors of English manufacturers.

In Ireland the section who suffered most immediately from the restriction of the woollen trade were the Protestant manufacturers and traders. Representatives of the Protestant Church in Ireland, like Archbishop King and Dean Swift, drew fearful pictures of its results, but they wrote from the point of view not of the masses of the Irish peasantry, but of the capitalist class now beginning to emerge in Ireland. King held that it would be much better for the English to help to

exploit the cheap labour of Ireland, rather than to restrict Irish industry.

Swift declared that land was now the only profitable investment, and that

The rise of our rents is squeezed out of the very blood and vitals, and clothes, and dwelling of the tenants, who live worse than English beggars.

(*Short View of the State of Ireland.*)

Speakers in the Irish House of Commons urging the removal of restrictions constantly talked of the terrible conditions which had resulted from English interference with Irish trade. But in fact it was mainly in the towns, and there chiefly among traders, and the comparatively small number of workers employed in manufacture, that the prohibition of the woollen industry was directly felt. To the peasants who had been driven from their holdings to make room for sheep pastures, it made little difference whether Irish wool was exported in a raw state or manufactured in Ireland. For landowners and middlemen, wool was still a profitable product; and extortionate rents were still wrung from the peasants for the privilege of cultivating land to keep themselves alive.

The trading and manufacturing class was not yet strong enough to resist the attacks of their English rivals. For many years the restriction of Irish trade by legislation enacted in the English Parliament continued. After the suppression of woollen exports came the Navigation Laws, by which trade with the Colonies was prohibited, except through England, and Irish shipping almost ceased to exist.

#### INVASION OF IRELAND.

A whole series of other measures followed, all of which aimed at restricting Irish production to the supply of raw materials for England, and crushing every manufacture which came into competition with British industry. The cotton trade, the glass trade, which had shown signs of becoming a very profitable industry, sugar refining, brewing, fish curing; each was in turn crippled if not completely destroyed by English legislation during the first half of the 18th century. Two industries were allowed to develop unimpeded: the linen trade and the smelting of iron. Iron was found in the south-east of Ireland, and the export of bar iron to supply English iron-works was encouraged, though the export of all other iron manufactures was stopped by prohibitive duties. Smelting was carried out in furnaces heated entirely by wood, with the result that the last remnants of the timber forests were destroyed.

The linen industry and the provision trade remained as

the only opportunities, apart from land, of profitable investment in Ireland. Roman Catholics were still excluded from purchasing land or holding long leases, and most of those who owned any capital invested it in trade. The provision trade came to be almost entirely Catholic-owned, while linen remained in the hands of the Protestants, partly because of the limitations of Catholic ownership, but also because the English Government directly encouraged Protestant manufacturers, and brought over French Huguenots to Ulster and Waterford to introduce technical improvements. Exports of Irish linen cloth increased from less than two million yards in 1710, to a yearly average of twenty million in the years 1770-9.

The profits of these branches of trade strengthened the capitalist groups in Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant, and they began to look for other profitable investments, and to press for the removal of restrictions on Irish trade. The movement for free trade (in the sense of freedom from all English-made restrictions, not tariffs only) and for political independence (control of Irish legislature) was supported by both Catholics and Protestants. Grattan, a Protestant, came forward as a leader of the campaign for free trade and Catholic Emancipation. The war between America and England gave Irish capitalists their opportunity, and the first stage of the bourgeois revolution in Ireland was accomplished with the aid of 40,000 Protestant volunteers, who had been armed, with the consent of the British Government, for the defence of Ireland in the event of an invasion.

Associations known as Non-Importation Leagues carried out an organised boycott of imported goods in all parts of the country, and the policy of wearing and using only Irish products became popular among women of the trading class in the towns. In November 1779, a demonstration by the Dublin Volunteers with posters demanding **Free Trade or a speedy Revolution** aroused great excitement, and the English Government began to get nervous. Within three months Bills were passed in the English Parliament removing all the important restrictions on Irish trade.

But the struggle was not finished. Grattan continued to lead the campaign for an independent Irish Parliament and the enfranchisement of Catholics. Meetings of the Volunteers, now numbering 80,000 under arms, were held in all parts of the country. At Dungannon, 143 delegates from the whole of the Ulster Volunteers met and passed resolutions in favour of parliamentary independence and control over the army, religious equality and freedom of trade. The Viceroy warned the English Government that to refuse these demands

would mean "an end of all government" in Ireland; and in January, 1783, a Bill was passed in the English Parliament definitely abolishing all legislative and judicial authority over Ireland.

The Irish Parliament, which thus became for the first time a controlling part of the State machine, was still exclusively Protestant and represented only a small section of the propertied class. For a hundred years or so after Cromwell's colonisation of Ireland, religious and racial difference had corresponded on the whole with the division of classes. The exploiters were Protestant and British, the exploited were Catholic and Irish. But the economic changes of the later eighteenth century, including those which had arisen out of English intervention in Irish trade, brought about a new armed conflict based upon the new division of forces.



## CHAPTER II.

## THE LAND WAR : FIRST STAGE.

In the later years of the eighteenth century, and all through the nineteenth century, the driving force of the nationalist struggle in Ireland was the revolt of the peasantry against the terrible conditions imposed on them by British landlordism. But during this period two phases can be distinguished. In the first, which lasted until the Famine and the Rising of 1848, the bourgeoisie—the traders and manufacturers whose earlier development was described in the last chapter—made use of the agrarian struggle in order to win power for themselves. The fact that landowners in Ireland, the direct exploiters of the peasantry, were the garrison of a foreign ruling class, and that this class was hindering the growth of the Irish bourgeoisie, gave the conflict its special nationalist character. The Irish bourgeoisie, unlike the native bourgeoisie in India or Egypt, was distinct from the landowning class, and therefore was not afraid of using the agrarian struggle. In the second phase, marked by the Fenian movement and the Land War, the remnants of feudal economy in Ireland were destroyed and the development of capitalist agriculture became possible.

A review of class divisions before the Rising of 1798 shows the forces that were actually involved in the first stage.

To the wealthiest class belonged the Protestant landowners, who alone were represented in the Irish Parliament and controlled the election of members for the boroughs which they owned. Among the first measures passed by the new Parliament were the Irish Corn Laws, which led to a rapid increase in tillage, the sub-division of farms (carried still further some years later, when 40/- freeholders were enfranchised), and a general rise in rents. High rents and the transfer of land at high prices brought increased profits into the hands of the landlords; but many of them were absentees living in England and investing these profits in English rather than Irish undertakings.

The trading and manufacturing class was made up both of Catholics, who, excluded by the Penal Laws from ownership of land or industry, were largely concerned in trade, and



Protestant manufacturers and merchants. One section of the Protestants had suffered under heavy disabilities during the period of developing Irish trade. The Presbyterians of Ulster, descendants of the privileged settlers of the early plantations, found themselves severely handicapped in the economic struggle. Dissenters as well as Catholics were excluded from all political rights and from civil and municipal office; they had been hard hit by the destruction of the woollen trade, and the American War had closed an important market for other products. Finally, while pasture lands (mostly owned, of course, by Anglican Protestants) were exempt from tithes, both the Presbyterian and the Catholic who tilled the land were compelled to pay tithes to support the clergy of the Protestant Established Church. It was estimated that, at the end of the 18th century, out of the total population of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million 3 million were Catholics, one million Dissenters, and only half a million Church of England Protestants. (*Castlereagh Memoirs*. P. 249.)

The burden of tithes affected the small but growing number of wage-earners, who formed a third group. Manufacture was still almost entirely in the stage of cottage industry, and the workers were partly dependent on the land they tilled for food. Arthur Young, afterwards Secretary to the British Board of Agriculture, who carried out a series of investigations in Ireland about this time, described the people of Ulster as "half-farmers, half-manufacturers"; local manufactures were not confined to towns but spread "to all the cabins of the country." (Young. *Tour in Ireland*, 1776-9, p. 57.)

The wages of workers employed in manufacture, according to Young, were "double to near treble those of husbandry labour throughout the kingdom." In the linen trade weavers earned from 1/- to 1/5 a day. But they were only employed for part of the year, and although they were a little better off than those who lived entirely on the land, their general conditions were nearly as wretched.

The great mass of the Irish people, the peasantry, lived in a state of desperate poverty, and were driven beyond endurance, first by the enclosures, which robbed them of common grazing ground, and afterwards by the rapid rise in rents that followed the Corn Laws. In this period, according to a contemporary writer, the rent of land—

has been much more than doubled in all parts of Ireland one with another, more than trebled in many, and the greatest rise has been in those counties where tillage has been pursued.

(Newenham. *Ireland*, p. 231.)

In Munster the rent of an acre of potato ground was £6, and the tenant had to work out his rent in labour for the landlord at the rate of 6d. a day. It required, therefore, 240 days' work to pay a year's rent, so that the peasant had to spend two-thirds of his labour power for the landlord. But even the remaining third was not his own. Direct taxation in the form of hearth tax was levied on 450,000 out of the 475,000 houses in Ireland, and indirect taxes were imposed to meet military expenditure, which, during the war between England and France, amounted in a single year to over £2,000,000. But the exaction of rent and taxes did not complete the process of exploitation; there was also the most hated burden of all, the payment of tithes for the Protestant clergy.

The peasants had gained nothing from the successes of the Irish bourgeoisie, and had literally nothing to lose. Therefore, when the Presbyterian traders of Ulster, in alliance with similar interests among the Catholics, attempted, under the influence of the French Revolution, to make use of the discontent of the peasants and to lead them into a "democratic" revolt, they found that they had unloosed forces far beyond their control. Before the Rising of 1798 actually took place the Ulster Presbyterians, who had led the movement of revolt, grew frightened and turned to support the English capitalist interests which were seeking to win back control of Ireland.

From the point of view of the agrarian movement the Rising of 1798 was part of a long series of revolts against intolerable conditions. The organisation known as the Whiteboys or Levellers had its origin nearly forty years earlier in Munster, where enclosures of waste land, following the development of pasture farming, added to the already overwhelming burden of rent, taxes and tithes. According to a contemporary writer, the cottiers (tenants paying their rent in labour) were

everywhere dispossessed of their little holdings, which, in considerable tracts, were set by the landlords to monopolisers, who, by feeding cattle, were enabled to pay them a higher rent. . . . To lessen somewhat the burdens by which they were oppressed, some of their landlords granted them the liberty of commonage. The relief was but temporary, for some time after, in breach of justice and positive compact, they were deprived of this privilege.

( Crawford. *History of Ireland*, 1783. II. 317-8.)

The main objects of the Whiteboys, who were very widely organised as a secret society, were the breaking down of boundaries on newly enclosed land, and resistance to tithes and

evictions. The extent and influence of their organisation terrified landlords and middlemen ("monopolizers") and laws were passed imposing savage punishments, including, according to Young, an Act by which "they were to be hanged under certain circumstances without the common formalities of a trial." But these measures only increased the activities of agrarian associations. The Whiteboys were followed by the Rightboys, whose method of organisation was to gather together the people of the parish and bind them by oath "to obey the laws of Captain Right and to starve the clergy." Each parish carried on the oath to the neighbouring parishes. Their first object was to resist tithes, but

they proceeded to regulate the price of land, to raise the price of labour, and to oppose the collection of the hearth money and other taxes.

(Lewis. *Disturbances in Ireland*, p. 20).

The Whiteboys and others in Munster were Catholics; but the basis of their organisation was economic. A pamphlet published in Dublin (1786) called "A Congratulatory Address to his Majesty from the Peasantry of Ireland, Vulgarly Denominated White Boys or Right Boys," gives figures showing that "on an average amongst several thousands of these people" the peasant paid £7 17s. 1d. in rent, tithes and taxes, while his earnings at 5d. a day amounted to £5 16s. 7d., leaving a deficiency of £2 0s. 6d. "This deficiency he is left to his own industry to make good at the time the iron-bound squire does not want his service." Opposition to the payment of tithes was encouraged by Protestant landlords and graziers in order to divert the peasants from agitation against themselves.

At about the same time similar organisations came into existence among the Protestants of Ulster, where oppression by the landowning class included compulsory unpaid labour on roadmaking (such as is still enforced in British West Africa and other colonial countries).

In the most populous, manufacturing, and consequently civilised, part of the province of Ulster, the inhabitants of one parish refused to make more of what they called "job roads." They rose almost to a man. . . . The discontent being as general as the grievance, the contagion seized the neighbouring parishes.

(Campbell, *Philosophical Survey of Ireland*, p. 309.)

This was the origin of the Oakboys, who were concerned also with the regulation of tithes and rents. A rising of Oakboys was suppressed by troops, but within a few years another association called the Hearts of Steel had arisen in

Antrim and Down, where, on the estates of one of the big land-owners, premiums were exacted for renewal of leases. Numbers of tenants were dispossessed, and were joined in their association by peasants from other counties.

So great and wide was the discontent, that many thousands of Protestants emigrated from these parts of Ulster to the American settlements, where they soon appeared in arms against the British Government, and contributed powerfully, by their zeal and valour, to the separation of the American colonies from the Empire of Great Britain.

(Gordon. *History of Ireland* II. 250.)

The various movements in which these associations played the leading part were localised and isolated from each other. Each of them was active in resisting some particular form of economic oppression, but they had no central organisation and no leadership to guide them towards a general struggle against the system of private property in land, which was at the root of their misery. They never attempted to challenge the central power, although they were continually fighting against its local agents.

English reports alleged that the Whiteboy disturbances were brought about by French intrigue and French gold. The English Government would not admit that their terrible conditions were driving the people to revolt, in spite of the mass of evidence, including the statements of English officials like Arthur Young. Young saw the danger, as some of the agents of imperialism see it in India to-day, where once again the cry of foreign intrigue is made the pretext for savage repression. Twenty years before the Rising of 1798 Young wrote:—

A better treatment of the poor in Ireland is a very material point to the welfare of the whole British Empire.

(*Tour in Ireland*, I. p. 56.)

But the policy of the English Government was to provoke the people of Ireland into a state of violence and disorder, so that English interests might re-establish absolute control. At the same time they feared an agrarian revolution, and therefore, religious differences were used to divide North and South and to create dissension. A clash between Catholics and Protestants, known as the Battle of the Diamond, was followed by a wholesale persecution of Catholics in Armagh, carried out by an organisation which afterwards became the Orange Society.

At this time the Catholic Defenders and the Protestant Volunteers had joined to form the Society of United Irishmen, under the combined leadership of Presbyterians and Catholics belonging to the professional and capitalist class.

The Catholics had secured some concessions from the Irish Parliament in the Relief Act of 1793, which gave the vote to freeholders of land valued at 40/- a year, and increased the electorate to about 200,000. But they were still excluded from Parliament and the Civil Service. The leaders of the United Irishmen were working for further economic and political concessions from the landowning interests, which, closely associated with the English ruling class, were holding back the development of capitalist industry in Ireland. Under the influence of the bourgeois Revolution in France, they declared their belief in the "Equal distribution of the rights of man throughout all classes," and demanded the confiscation of big estates. (O'Connor. *History of Ireland*. 64-66.) By this means they won the support of thousands of peasants in the South and West, and the outrages of the Orangemen brought new adherents in the North. The Government issued a proclamation prohibiting military societies and military drill; the Society of United Irishmen became illegal, and continued to grow and organise in secret.

An Insurrection Act was passed, imposing the death penalty for taking the oath of membership in a "seditious" association, and the use of foreign troops was legalised. Hundreds of United Irishmen were deported and forced into service with the British Navy, where some became the leaders of the mutiny at the Nore. Flogging, tortures and hanging were carried out by the Yeomanry under the command of English officers, and religious feeling was more and more embittered. At last the Protestant section began to withdraw from the United Irishmen. The people of Ulster believed that there was to be war on all Protestants, and the bourgeois Presbyterians retreated from what they feared would be a peasant revolution.

Wolfe Tone and other leaders of the United Irishmen attempted to organise help from France. An expedition sailed in 1796, but met with a series of disasters, and never went into action at all. Another expedition arrived in the autumn of 1798, too late to support the Rising in Southern Ireland, which began in May. In Wexford and Kildare British troops were forced to retreat, but the complete failure of support from the North, after the Battle of Antrim, led to the rapid defeat of the whole of the Irish forces. Estimates of the total losses vary from 30,000 to 70,000. (Davis. *Memoir of Curran*. p. 311) Nearly all the Irish killed in the fighting belonged to the peasant class.

After the defeat of the Rising the English Government, by means of bribes amounting to a million pounds, secured

from the Irish Parliament the Act of Union of 1801. Under the Act the Irish Parliament ceased to exist, and a hundred Protestant members elected by Irish constituencies were sent to Westminster. Control of Irish taxation was transferred to the United Parliament and a substantial part of the cost of military and civil services for the United Kingdom was to be raised in Ireland. Protection for Irish industries was prevented by clauses providing that trade between the two countries should be duty free.

Two years later Robert Emmet, a brother of one of the leaders of the United Irishmen, attempted once more to rally support for the struggle against British rule. He issued a proclamation to the citizens of Dublin, calling on them to remember their "oppressors for six hundred years," and declaring that there was "complete and universal co-operation from the country." But in fact when Emmet led his working-class followers into the streets of Dublin there had been very little preparation in the country, and the Rising had no real organisation behind it. Emmet retreated when he found that there was no support from the rest of the country. He himself was afterwards arrested and hanged, and another period of martial law and violent repression followed the Dublin Insurrection.

But no repression, however brutal, could break the forces of agrarian revolt. The Whiteboys were reorganised, and a number of new associations sprang up. In the first twenty years after the Union, Coercion Acts at the rate of one a year were passed by the British Parliament in a vain endeavour to stamp out their activities. That the leaders of these organisations all belonged to the most oppressed and exploited section—the poorest peasants and the farm labourers—was shown by almost every witness who gave evidence at the official inquiry of 1824. They were described as belonging to "the very lowest class of peasants and farm servants." (Lewis. *Disturbances in Ireland*. p. 181.)

These immense forces of revolt among the peasants and agricultural workers were ready to the hand of any agitator who challenged the existing order in Ireland. Daniel O'Connell, who at the time of the '98 Rising was a young man just entering into his career as a barrister, saw the possibilities and set to work once again to use the intolerable lives of the people as the basis for a campaign to increase the political power of the bourgeoisie. The leaders of the United Irishmen had brought the peasants into an armed struggle; O'Connell devised the method of "agitation within the law," first for Catholic Emancipation, and afterwards for Repeal of the

Union. In the first he secured a limited success, which in no way endangered English interests. In the second he gave up the fight. An Englishman writing during the first campaign observed that

The great strength of the Catholic Party in Ireland consists in their legal combination to carry their own objects, or, at the most, in their legal resistance to the law. This combination and this passive resistance are organised by persons of a high class, and are intended to produce results which will affect the rich far more than the poor.

(Lewis. *Disturbances in Ireland*. p. 174.)

O'Connell built up the Catholic Association on the basis of a comprehensive programme of reforms, including within its scope the relief of almost every known form of oppression. He gathered round him hundreds of thousands of peasant supporters, and raised funds at the rate of £1,000 per week. But he never allowed control to pass out of his own hands; he never organised his adherents for leadership in the struggle. In fact, he did not organise them at all. The Association was composed of members paying £1 1s. 0d. a year, and associates paying one penny a month (collected by the priests). The associates with their pennies brought in thousands of pounds to O'Connell's funds (known as the Catholic Rent), but they had no control. O'Connell achieved enormous personal popularity; he used it to keep the country tranquil, to hold the forces of revolution within the bounds of constitutional agitation, and to secure increased political power for a small section of Irish Catholics. With this object he turned the campaign away from the struggle against actual oppression in Ireland, and concentrated it on a Parliamentary agitation at Westminster; he refused help from the English Chartists, and bitterly attacked Irish Trade Unionists, who were then fighting their first battles for the right of combination. (O'Connor, *History* I, 267). He bargained with the Government in England, and finally accomplished the passing of a Bill to "emancipate" Catholics by accepting terms which abolished the 40/- franchise and reduced the Irish electorate from 200,000 to 26,000, but allowed Catholic members to sit in the English House of Commons.

In spite of the fact that the emancipation campaign had secured nothing for Irish peasants and workers, in spite of the open acceptance of Government offices by O'Connell's two sons; in spite of the "neglected wretchedness" of the tenants on O'Connell's own estate of Derrymore, he was still able to re-establish his following and his funds for a campaign to repeal the Act of Union. The "Catholic Rent" became the "Repeal Rent," and in the year following the Emancipation



Act amounted to £50,000. When a Whig Government came into office in England, O'Connell once more attempted to bargain. He abandoned the campaign for independence and tried to get a settlement on the basis of what is now known as Dominion Status, in order to conciliate the definitely "Unionist" section among Protestant commercial interests. The Orangemen of Ulster remained in existence (in spite of nominal disbandment) as an armed force of 200,000, ready to resist any real movement for Irish independence (McLennan, *Memoir*. 261). O'Connell, like his successor Gandhi in India, maintained the doctrine of non-violence. He declared that no human revolution was worth the shedding of a single drop of blood. (Lecky, *Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland II*, 273).

But the people who had suffered the violence and bloodshed of English rule would not so easily abandon the struggle for independence, and in the last years of his life O'Connell returned to the campaign in order to lead it into safe channels. He announced that repeal would come in the year 1843, and summoned a great meeting at Clontarf. The meeting was proclaimed, and troops were called out. O'Connell immediately prohibited the meeting, and ordered his followers to disperse.

All the agencies of the organisation were employed to warn the people against attending the meeting and against every kind of resistance or outrage, and they succeeded. Horsemen were sent long distances from Dublin to intercept and warn the country people who were already trooping in (Lecky, II, 263).

No meeting was held, and O'Connell continued to keep the people quiet. Within a few months he allowed himself to be arrested on a charge of sedition, but the moment of his arrest was deferred until, instead of bringing the masses of his followers into action, it served as a pretext for further delay. O'Connell's repeal movement ended in a harmless demonstration at the time of his release.

Engels, writing three months before the Clontarf incident, said:—

If O'Connell were really a popular leader, if he had sufficient courage and he was himself not afraid of the people, i.e., if he were not a double-faced Whig but a straight, consistent democrat, then long ago there would not have been one English soldier in Ireland, not one Protestant parasitic minister in purely Catholic districts. . . . Give the people freedom for one second and they will do with O'Connell and his financial aristocracy what the latter want to do with the Tories.



John Mitchel, one of the leaders of the Young Ireland Movement, which sought to revive the struggle for independence, said of O'Connell that "Next to the British Government, he was the greatest enemy Ireland ever had" (Paul-Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland*, p. 63).

In the Young Ireland Movement the class issue in the struggle for independence had to be definitely faced. But the Rising of 1848, and the betrayal of the peasants and workers by the leaders of Young Ireland, arose out of new developments in the exploitation of Irish agriculture, which must first be described.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE LAND WAR : SECOND STAGE

In the first half of the nineteenth century Ireland was changed from a country of pasture farms into a country producing corn for England. Under the English Corn Laws, which were in force up to 1846, duties on corn imported from foreign countries raised the price of English and Irish crops and made arable farming highly profitable to landlords and middlemen. In the early part of the century, during the Napoleonic wars, prices of Irish corn rose enormously, rents increased, and farms were divided and sub-divided by profiteering owners and agents. After the war wheat prices dropped to less than half their former level.

In this first half century the population of Ireland nearly doubled. At the time of the Union it was  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million. When the famine began in 1845 it was over eight million. In that period there had been very little emigration, early marriages were encouraged by the priests, and large families were the rule. The high prices paid for Irish corn during the war years made it possible for a family to live on a very small holding, and in some parts of the country, for example, in Kerry, population was 416 to the square mile and rent was £10 an acre. In England and Wales, with their growing industrial towns, average population was 272 to the square mile.

When prices fell thousands of small peasants were ruined and could no longer pay their rent. Then began the period of clearances and the consolidation of large estates. The extortionate rents of the war years were followed by wholesale evictions, leading to a great increase in the number of workers who were divorced from the land, and many of whom were completely unemployed.

Figures given in the reports of the Irish Poor Law Commission of 1835 show that the total value of Irish agricultural production was £36,000,000. Out of this £10,000,000 was absorbed by the landowning class in rent. The producers (working tenant farmers and agricultural labourers) received a little over £5,000,000. The balance of over £20,000,000 went to taxes, tithes and the profits of middlemen, merchants and money-lenders.

The number of working farmers not employing labourers was 564,000, and the number of agricultural labourers slightly more. These two groups, which were now constantly inter-

changing, made up the whole class of agricultural producers, numbering 1,132,000. Their average income per head was less than £5 a year.

The working tenant or cottier worked for the landlord at wage rates of 5d. to 6d. per day, and occupied a cabin and potato patch. In many districts at the beginning of the nineteenth century wages were still not paid in cash at all. The tenant had the use of a piece of land and worked out his rent in labour. But conditions after the war drove thousands of peasants to give up their holdings and to sell their labour for wages.

The Commission found that there were

Out of work and in distress during 30 weeks in the year not less than 585,000 persons, which, with those depending on them, will make a total of 2,385,000 persons requiring support for 30 weeks in the year.

In other words, more than half the agricultural population was unemployed for more than half the year.

Landlords and their agents enforced ruthless evictions against those whose rent was in arrears, pulled down their cottages, and turned the cottiers' holdings into large farms. Evidence given before a Committee of the House of Commons showed that old people and children, the sick and the dying, were driven with equal callousness from their homes. According to one witness over a thousand people were evicted from two neighbouring parishes, among them a great many old people "that became beggars, and a good many of them died of want."

Another method of getting hold of the peasants' holdings was to seize "their furniture and their pig, and if they have one, their cow," and even their potato crop, for arrears of rent. When the ruin of the tenant "naturally followed" the landlord took over the land (Lewis, *Disturbances in Ireland* p. 84).

O'Connell's Emancipation Act of 1829, which abolished the 40/- franchise, helped to increase the number of evictions, because the small holder no longer counted as a voter. The following figures show the extraordinary increase in the size of holdings between 1841 and 1851.

Size of Holdings.	No. of Separate Holdings.	
	1841	1851
Under 1 acre	134,314	37,728
1—5 acres	310,436	88,083
5—15 acres	252,799	191,854
15—30 acres	79,342	141,311
Over 30 acres	48,625	149,090

It seems impossible to exaggerate the wretchedness of Irish land-workers under the grinding exploitation of the landowning class in this period, when Ireland was still the cornfield of England. Isaac Butt, Professor of Political Economy in Dublin, and afterwards leader of the constitutional Home Rule Party in the House of Commons, described their conditions as "a hideous and appalling mass of misery and destitution," and said that—

The evidence collected by the Poor-Inquiry Commission, if it proves anything, proves this, that generally throughout whole districts of Ireland penury and almost starvation, are the general conditions of the classes who are called, by a mockery of their misery, the labouring classes—which means the classes that are willing to labour, and can get no employment; it proves that the labourer cannot, by the utmost exertion of his industry, procure sufficient to support himself and his family throughout the year. (Letter to the Secretary for Ireland on the Poor Law Bill.)

But there was greater wretchedness to come, for which the landowning class and the English Government were directly responsible.

The famine started with disease of the potato crop of 1845, and continued with increasing severity for three years. The average value of Irish production of crops and livestock in each of the three years 1846 to 1848 was £40,000,000, and food products, more than enough to feed the whole population, continued to be exported all through the famine, in payment of capitalist rent and profit. In 1848 300,000 people died of hunger in Ireland, and nearly two million quarters of wheat and barley were exported. It was only the potato crop that failed; but for hundreds of thousands of Irish families, who had no other means of subsistence, the loss of the potato crop meant literal starvation.

English capitalist writers and politicians, at the time and afterwards, maintained that nothing must be allowed to interfere with the course of trade. The Government, when the people were dying at the rate of five to ten thousand a week, allowed charity funds to be collected in England, organised public works (entirely unproductive, and intended only as task work for those who claimed relief), and finally purchased supplies of Indian corn from America. But these supplies were not allowed to be distributed until all private stores were sold out. Irish grain crops were not touched.

The total deaths from starvation and fever were officially estimated at nearly a million. Mitchel, one of the leaders of the Young Ireland Movement, calculated that 1½ million men, women and children "died of hunger in the midst of abundance which their own hands created." In the six years

from 1847, one million emigrants left Ireland. The Census Report of 1851 was quoted by Mitchel as revealing the attitude of the British Government:—

Although the population has been diminished in so remarkable a manner by famine, disease, and emigration, and has been since decreasing, the results of the Irish Census are, on the whole, satisfactory. (*Last Conquest of Ireland* p224.)

The clearance of small farms was greatly accelerated during the famine by the exclusion from relief of anyone who had more than a quarter of an acre of land. Thousands gave up their holdings, and the Relief Bill of 1847 came to be known as the Eviction-Made-Easy Act (Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, p. 172).

It was the experience of the famine, and the spectacle of the landlords taking possession of "the whole effective sum and substance of the harvest" while the people starved, that gave rise to the No Rent Campaign of James Fintan Lalor. In 1847 he put forward a programme of which the first demand was as follows:—

That in order to save their own lives, the occupying tenants of the soil of Ireland ought, next autumn, to refuse all rent and arrears of rent then due, beyond and except the value of the overplus of the harvest produce remaining in their hands after having deducted and reserved a due and full provision for their own subsistence during the next ensuing twelve months.

The leaders of the Young Ireland movement, although they were professed revolutionaries and declared themselves in favour of independence for Ireland, hesitated to support Lalor's campaign because it meant a definite attack on the propertied class to which most of them belonged. A division arose between the physical force party, led by John Mitchel, and the moderate majority, which included William Smith O'Brien.

Mitchel himself said that the Young Ireland group had among its members

Conservatives, moderate Reformers, levelling Democrats; and they do not, as a body, consider the ruin of the landed gentry to be the best remedy or any remedy at all for Irish ills. (O'Connor. *History*, I, 250.)

Without seeing the economic causes of Ireland's ills as Lalor saw them, or attempting to organise a mass movement, Mitchel advocated armed insurrection. He edited a paper called "United Ireland" in which he and his supporters of the physical force party, inspired by the wave of revolutionary

nationalism that was sweeping over Europe, called for a renewal of 1798. Lalor and Mitchel were both arrested by the British Government on the eve of an Irish rising. Lalor was only released when he was too ill to carry on the fight, a few months before his death. Mitchel was deported to Van Diemen's Land, and the leadership was left in the hands of Smith O'Brien, the landowner, and his friends.

They could not completely check the rising, but they did their best to weaken and restrict it. They held meetings in the country districts of the south and west, but when they found the peasants eager for action they told them to wait. They refused to allow the starving people to touch the loads of corn which passed them on the roads. When a body of English cavalry came to barricades put up by the insurgent peasants, O'Brien allowed them to pass through. Almost the only actual fighting took place at Ballingarry between the Royal Irish Constabulary and a band of peasants, most of them armed only with pikes and pitchforks. The police fired on them from a house, and a number of peasants were killed. O'Brien and other leaders were arrested and sentenced to long terms of transportation, but were released under an amnesty a few years later.

In spite of rising agricultural prices and the draining away of the population, there was very little change for the better in the conditions of the peasants. Evictions continued, and many of the dispossessed drifted to the towns, where sharp struggles with the employing class took place. In less than a generation a new armed conflict began.

The Rising of 1867, although it was on a small scale and was easily crushed by the British troops, was different from the three earlier insurrections because it marked the beginning of a long period of mass resistance to the landowning class. It was this struggle which led at last to the enactment of a whole series of Land Laws by the British Government, carried through by Gladstone and his successors, in order to establish in Ireland a class of small proprietors who would make the country safe from agrarian revolution.

This policy had already been put forward by English Liberals like Sir Charles Trevelyan, who proposed at the time of the famine that the free sale of Irish land to small owners should be encouraged, because by this means "all property in land would be rendered secure against revolutionary violence." (*Irish Crisis* p. 32.)

The Fenian Brotherhood was established about 1863 by Irishmen in the United States, and many of its members gained military experience in the American Civil War. A

parallel organisation called the Irish Republican Brotherhood was set up at the same time in Ireland. Members of the Brotherhood were pledged to strive

for the liberation of Ireland from the yoke of England and for the establishment of a free and independent government on the Irish soil,

and to obey implicitly the commands of their superior officers in the organisation.

In the early days the movement was very largely dependent on the support of the Irish population in America, whose memory of conditions in Ireland before and during the famine was still fresh. It had close connections with Irish workers in English industrial towns. The Fenian programme was definitely international; it included support for "all struggling nationalities in the British Empire and elsewhere" (*New York Herald*, October 25, 1878).

In Ireland the strength of the movement was drawn from the workers. The rank and file of its soldiers (according to an anonymous pamphlet attacking the Irish Republican Brotherhood) were "labouring men in Irish fields, printers, tailors, house-painters, rnavies, dock labourers" (Mr. Parnell and the I.R.B., p. 7). But the organisation was controlled from above, and the key positions were held by lawyers, journalists, and tradesmen; and through some of their connections treachery and corruption became widespread in the movement.

At the end of the year 1863 a Fenian Convention was held in Chicago, from which a manifesto was issued "To the Brotherhood all over the World," calling upon them to prepare for action under strict discipline, and declaring that

We are thoroughly convinced of the utter futility of legal and constitutional agitations, Parliamentary "policies" and similar delusions.

Very large sums of money were collected in America, and a paper called the "Irish People" was published in Dublin by O'Donovan Rossa, James Stephens and other leaders. It was through a man employed in the office of the paper that information giving full details of the plans for an armed rising was put into the hands of the British Government. In the autumn of 1865 all the prominent leaders in Ireland were arrested and sentenced to long terms of penal servitude. O'Donovan Rossa was sentenced for life. Stephens escaped to the United States.

But the movement was far too widespread and too deeply rooted in the long struggle of Irish workers and peasants, to be crushed by the removal of one group of leaders. All

through the following year arrests and imprisonments continued. Boats arriving from the United States were closely watched, but connections between the Irish and American organisations remained unbroken, and Fenian groups were set up in London, Liverpool, Glasgow, and other English towns.

Early in 1867 the signal was at last given for an armed rising, which was to take place simultaneously in Dublin, Louth, Tipperary, Cork, Waterford and Limerick. But the Government, with its spies inside the organisation, was fully prepared. Troops and armed police in great numbers were ready to crush the first signs of insurrection, and when the rebellion actually started it was put down in twenty-four hours. Hundreds of Fenians were arrested.

The rising in Ireland was followed by a series of Fenian activities in England: an attempt to rescue two Irish prisoners in Manchester by an attack on a prison van; the blowing up of a part of Clerkenwell Prison, where Irish prisoners were confined; and a number of attacks on railway stations and other places in London. A fund known as the Skirmishing Fund was collected, to be used in a campaign of terrorism, but these terrorist activities were isolated from the mass movement in Ireland, which was now entering on a new period of fierce and continuous conflict.

The forty years that followed the famine and the repeal of the Corn Laws witnessed immense economic changes in Ireland. The human population was reduced by nearly half: from 8,174,000 in 1841 to 4,700,000 in 1891, while flocks and herds were more than doubled. The area under corn crops fell from over 3 million acres to 1½ million, corn production declined from a yearly average of 1,085,000 tons in the five years 1847 to 1851 to 489,000 in the years 1887 to 1891, and the number of people supported by agriculture decreased from 5 million to 2½ million.

As early as 1867 Karl Marx described the new stage of English rule in Ireland as a "system which wants to supplant the Irish by sheep, pigs and bullocks." He showed that—

What the English do not yet know is that since 1846 the economic content, and, therefore, the political aim, of the English Rule in Ireland has entered into a completely new stage, and, therefore, Fenianism is distinguished by a socialistic tendency (in the negative sense, as a movement directed against the appropriation of the soil) and as a movement of the lower orders. (Letter to Engels, November 30, 1867.)

Because of these new economic conditions the socialist tendency of Fenianism became much more definite in the land war of the succeeding generation. Fenianism was the parent



of the Land League, which drew into its ranks immense numbers of the Irish peasantry in the fight against expropriation.

The Land League adopted the No Rent Campaign advocated by Lalor, and the method of the boycott—the very name of which was derived from the name of a resident land agent, Captain Boycott, who was shunned by the whole neighbourhood because he attempted to enforce evictions on behalf of one of the big landowners in Mayo.

The League was formed in 1879, a year when, for the third time in succession, harvests were bad. The fall in the value of crops was as follows (in million £):—

Year	Potatoes	Other crops	Total
1876	12	36	48
1877	5	28	33
1878	7	32	39
1879	3	22	25

Aggregate rent, estimated at twelve million pounds, represented one-fourth of the value of production in 1876, and nearly half in 1879 (O'Connor, *History*, II. p. 53).

At one of the early meetings of the Land League a resolution was passed in which the members pledged themselves never to bid for, take or hold the farm from which our neighbour has been evicted for the non-payment of an unjust rent, and never to take hand, act or part in sowing or saving the crops thereon, and (to) hold the man who will do so as a public enemy.

This pledge was carried out to the letter. Land League courts were held to decide on the punishment of those who broke the League's rules, and the local Press supported their decisions. Nearly the whole of rural Ireland, apart from Ulster, came under the influence of the League, which grew to be the most powerful association organised on a class basis that Ireland has ever known. A generation later Connolly thus described its influence:—

During Land League days in Ireland, when a tenant was evicted from a farm not only his fellow-tenants but practically the whole country united to help him in his fight. When the evicted farm was rented by another tenant, a land-grabber or "scab," every person in the countryside shunned him as a leper, and, still better, fought him as a traitor. . . . At the command of the Land League every servant and labourer quit the service of the landlord. . . . When the landlord had declared war upon the tenant by evicting him, the labourers responded by war upon the landlord.

(*Socialism Made Easy*. p. 13.)

The British Government and the British Press grew more and more alarmed. English newspapers declared that

"Communism of the most frightful kind" had invaded Ireland, and the Government issued orders for the arrest of Land League leaders. Michael Davitt, the founder of the League, and at that time one of its most revolutionary leaders, was the first to be arrested, on a charge of using seditious language. A great demonstration against his arrest was held in November, 1879, and among the speakers was Charles Stewart Parnell.

Parnell, who, like O'Connell, was a landowner, had already been a Member of Parliament for four years, and had initiated the method of parliamentary obstruction by Irish members at Westminster, in opposition to Isaac Butt, official leader of the Home Rule group. When Butt died Parnell became the acknowledged leader of the Irish Party in the House of Commons. At the same time he identified himself with the Land League, and became its president.

Parnell attempted, in the policy known as the "new departure," to combine constitutional and illegal methods. He stated his belief that "A true revolutionary movement in Ireland should partake both of a constitutional and illegal character" (*New York Herald*, January 2, 1880), and he hoped to draw in (and control) the "physical force" party of the I.R.B. But neither the "nationalists," as this section was called, nor the "provincialists" (the constitutional section) recognised in practice that the direct consequence of the land war and the No Rent Campaign must be actual seizure of the land, leading to a struggle for power against the British ruling class arising out of agrarian revolution.

The principle had been laid down by Irish revolutionaries in America at a meeting held in New York in September, 1878. A resolution was passed declaring Ireland's right to complete freedom, and that

the abolition of the foreign landlord system and the substitution of one by which the tiller of the soil will be fixed permanently upon it, and holding directly from the State, is the only true solution of the Irish land question, which an Irish Republic can alone effect. (O'Connor, *History*, II, p. 61.)

The leaders in Ireland, however, like their predecessors in 1848, were not prepared to go forward to the final issue.

Parnell went over to the United States to raise funds for the League, and returned during the General Election of 1880, which brought the second Gladstone Government into office. In the following year a Coercion Act was passed, under which every person suspected of supporting the Land League could be arrested and imprisoned without trial. The Land League was proclaimed, and Parnell was arrested. While he was in

Kilmainham Gaol negotiations were carried on between Parnell and Gladstone, and an arrangement was reached by which the Government was to legislate against evictions for arrears of rent and to introduce certain other measures, while Parnell was to stop "outrages and intimidations of all kinds." On this basis Parnell declared that he and his followers would be able "to co-operate cordially with the Liberal Party in forwarding Liberal principles." (O'Connor, History, II, 97).

Forster, who, as Irish Secretary, had administered the Coercion Act with extreme harshness, resigned, and Lord Frederick Cavendish was appointed to succeed him. On May 2, 1882, Parnell was released. On May 6 Cavendish arrived in Dublin. The same evening he and Burke, the Under-Secretary, were assassinated in Phoenix Park. Parnell and Davitt published a denunciation of the assassins, and identified themselves henceforth with the constitutional Home Rule movement. The Land League campaign, which had brought Ireland to the verge of agrarian revolution, was side-tracked into a Parliamentary agitation for local self-government (Home Rule within the Empire) and for gradual land reforms. Parnell and many of his associates abandoned revolutionary activity for ever, while the "nationalists" in the Land League continued the old methods of terrorism, and the British Government set to work to divide and conquer the mass movement of the Irish peasantry.

Gladstone's Land Act of 1881 was the first of a series of measures by which the agrarian revolution was checked, and a new class of small proprietors was brought into existence. This Act established the principles known as "the three F's"—fair rent, fixity of tenure, and freedom of sale. Tribunals were set up to fix rents for a period of fifteen years, and during this time the tenant could not be evicted. These conditions, which already existed in the North under the "Ulster Custom," were made legally binding on the whole of Ireland.

The Land League opposed the Bill, and called upon its members not to apply to the Land Courts. In the words of T. P. O'Connor, who, together with John Dillon, the two Redmonds and Tim Healy, was once a militant leader of the land war,

Gladstone's policy was to fix a relation between landlord and tenant; the policy of the League was to abolish the relation and trample landlordism beneath its heels.

(Speech at Kansas, 1882. O'Connor, II, 93.)

But when Parnell and the rest abandoned the struggle and turned to Parliamentary action, the mass of the peasants, seeing some immediate hope of escaping eviction, flocked to the Land Courts. Even during the most active period of the

Land League evictions were continually enforced; in the nine years from 1878 to 1886 120,000 people were turned out of their holdings (Tynan, *Irish National Invincibles*, p. 408). By offering some measure of security the British Government immediately succeeded in winning large numbers of the peasants away from revolutionary action, and in this policy the former leaders of the land war became the Government's most effective allies.

The Act of 1881 was followed by four other measures which not only provided against eviction and the raising of rents for tenants' improvements, but established peasant "ownership" by means of state loans. Actually the exploitation of the working farmer through the payment of rent was transferred from the landowning to the bondholding section of the capitalist class.

The Land Purchase Acts of 1885, 1891, 1896 and 1902 authorised advances by the Land Commissioners to tenants for purchase of their holdings. The sums advanced were raised by means of public loans, on which the landholder paid a fixed annual sum (annuity) in interest and repayment of principal. In the thirty years following the first Land Purchase Act over 400,000 holdings with a total area of more than 13 million acres, were sold, at an aggregate purchase price of 124 million pounds.

The transfer of rent from the landholder to the loanholder made little difference in the actual condition of the poor peasants. On the whole, the change tended to help the capitalist farmer to extend his farm, but left the position of the "uneconomic" holder and of the agricultural labourer untouched. By means of other measures, including the Agricultural Labourers' Acts of 1883 to 1906 and the establishment of the Congested Districts Board in 1891, attempts were made to satisfy the land hunger of both these groups. The Congested Districts Board was designed to deal with the overcrowded areas of the south-west, where, according to an official report, the people "were in a chronic state of famine and their standard of living was at the lowest point."

The wages of agricultural labourers at the end of the nineteenth century were about 8/- a week. The Agricultural Labourers' Acts authorised the compulsory purchase of land for distribution in small plots to agricultural workers, and thus, in effect, provided a grant-in-aid to capitalist farmers employing wage-labour.

The second Gladstone Government aimed not only at a settlement of the land question, but also at putting an end to nationalist agitation by granting a measure of Home Rule

in local affairs, with all essential questions reserved for Imperial control. The defeat of 1836 and the return of the Salisbury Government led to the Balfour regime in Ireland, involving a new era of coercion. The Bill of 1893, introduced when Gladstone was again in office, was thrown out by the House of Lords, and it was not until 1914, when industrial and financial interests had broken the power of the landowning aristocracy in the House of Lords, that a measure of Home Rule became law. But the Home Rule Act of 1914 was never put into operation.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE INDUSTRIAL STRUGGLE.

The destruction of the Irish corn trade and the driving away of the peasants from the land in the second half of the 19th century led, as was shown above, to an overwhelming change in the economic life of the country. Millions emigrated to America, thousands to the growing industrial towns in England. Many thousands of others, who could no longer make a living from the land and had no means of leaving the country, drifted into the towns. Thus in Ireland as well as in England the proportion of town to country population increased in this period; but while in England this tendency was part of a general increase in population which accompanied expanding production and a rising standard of living, in Ireland it took place side by side with the impoverishment of the peasantry and a general decline in population.

The following figures show how immense were the changes in the population of Ireland during the fifty years from 1841 to 1891:—

	1841	1891
Total population of Ireland ...	8,175,000	4,700,000
Population of towns with over 10,000 inhabitants ... ..	621,000	844,000
Per cent. of total population ...	7.6	18.0
Area of agricultural land per head of rural population (acres)	1.8	3.9

The pressure of the rural population on the land, generally accepted as the chief cause of Ireland's prevailing poverty, had been greatly reduced by starvation and emigration, while the increase in the town population suggests that industrial production was increasing. Capitalist writers represented the famine as a blessing in disguise, which had relieved Ireland of its superfluous population, and tried to show that in the following generation the Irish people became increasingly prosperous. The Dublin correspondent of the London "Times" declared at the end of 1875 that Ireland had never appeared "more free from serious crime, more prosperous and contented."

But the actual facts, as revealed in census figures, give quite a different picture. An English bourgeois economist,

Charles Booth, in an article on the economic distribution of population in Ireland, wrote:—

The view is commonly held that in general well-being Ireland has enormously improved since the famine. No evidence of the improvement is to be found in the occupation returns, which, on the contrary, point to a demoralisation of industry likely to be the cause, as well as consequence, of poverty and waning trade, and certain to be the source of political discontent. (*Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*. Ed. by Coyne, p. 66.)

Not only the actual numbers, but the proportion of the population engaged in productive industry (agriculture, fishing, mining, building and manufacture) had steadily declined. The percentage of the total occupied population in these industries fell from 80.6 in 1841 to 66.7 in 1861, and 60.4 in 1881.

Changes in the actual numbers engaged in the main occupation were as follows (in thousands):—

	1841 (thousands)	1881	Inc. or dec.
Building ... ..	72	56	minus 16
Manufacture ... ..	989	379	minus 610
(Incl. Textiles ... ..)	696	130	minus 566)
Public Services and			
Professions ... ..	57	121	plus 64
Commercial ... ..	12	16	plus 4
General Labourers ...	31	144	plus 113
Domestic Service ...	341	426	plus 85
Agriculture ... ..	1,844	986	minus 858

The very great reduction in the numbers employed in manufacture was chiefly due to the disappearance of the hand spinning and weaving industries, which in 1841 were still carried on in numbers of cottages and small workshops. In that year there were 441,000 workers returned as "weavers and spinners and factory hands," in addition to 135,000 engaged in the linen trade, and 80,000 in woollen cloth manufacture. These cottage industries were driven out of existence in the years of extreme depression after the famine—the same years which saw the rapid expansion of the textile industries of Lancashire and Yorkshire. In Ireland, except in the linen trade, large scale production never replaced the cottage textile industry. Thus, while the number of Irish textile workers fell from 696,000 to 130,000 the number of English textile workers rose in the same period from 604,000 to 962,000.

It was only in non-productive occupations in Ireland that the numbers employed increased; and among these general labourers formed the largest group. But general labourers

in Ireland did not include, as in England and Scotland, large numbers of unskilled workers more or less definitely attached to building or manufacturing industries; they were casual workers who "sprang into existence not from any need of their services but as the outcome of agricultural and industrial distress" (Booth).

Next in number was the increase in domestic servants, and this change was in itself significant of the process by which the poor were growing poorer and the rich richer. Professional and public service (including police) more than doubled their numbers; the proportion of workers employed in transport and commerce increased, including the small shopkeepers, who became very numerous in every town and village.

What were the conditions which prevented Ireland from developing into an industrial country, in this period when large-scale industries in England and other European countries were making such rapid progress? It has to be remembered that Ireland has little coal and very limited metal supplies, while the land and climate are extraordinarily favourable for agricultural production. But there were other reasons arising out of the economic relations between England and Ireland.

It has been shown that in the early days of capitalism there was a conflict between manufacturing interests in Ireland and rival groups in England, and that although, after the position of the English bourgeoisie was firmly established, certain concessions were made to the Irish, still control remained in the hands of English interests. These interests required that Ireland should provide cheap food for British factory workers. By the middle of the nineteenth century the rapid expansion of English industry led to the opening up of other sources of cheap food by the abolition of the Corn Laws, with ruinous results for the Irish peasants. But the owners of land in Ireland continued to extract rents from the starving peasantry, and to transfer a larger proportion of these rents for investment in English industry. It was estimated that in this period one-third of the total amount of Irish rent was drawn by absentee landlords living in England, and that over two million pounds a year was withdrawn from Ireland for investment in English Government stock. In 1860 British and Indian stock held in Ireland amounted to forty million pounds. Much of the capital of the English railways was drawn from Ireland. Irish banks paid 2 per cent. on deposits from Irish tradesmen and others, invested the money in London at rates varying from 4 to 10 per cent., and thus paid



their (largely English) shareholders dividends of 20 per cent. on the bank's capital (Murphy, *Ireland Industrial, Political and Social*; Kane *Industrial Resources of Ireland*; Grimshaw, *Facts and Figures about Ireland*).

Thus British capitalism, which was developing the productive resources of England, held back the industrialisation of Ireland and drained the life-blood of the Irish peasant in order to pile up profits in England. But the English factory workers and the Irish landworkers had not yet realised that the same system was exploiting them both, and that they were facing a common enemy. In England imperialist expansion created an aristocracy of labour, to which the employing class could afford to give certain privileges. English trade unions were chiefly concerned in safeguarding these privileges, and when they extended their activities to Ireland, it was on the same lines of protecting the conditions of certain occupations, mainly of skilled craftsmen.

Such occupations for Irish workers existed chiefly in Ulster, where industrial production developed mainly under the direct ownership of British capitalists. In 1911 Ulster had 28 per cent. of the total population of Ireland, and 42 per cent. of the industrial workers. The most important industries were linen and shipbuilding.

The first linen factory using power looms was established in 1850, and although the introduction of power-driven machinery led to a decline in the number of workers employed, the linen trade grew steadily.

	No. of spindles (thousands)	No. of power looms (thousands)	No. of workers (thousands)
1841	250	—	135
1862	593	5	33
1868	905	13	57
1875	925	20	62 (1885)
1912	951	37	72 (1907)

The total capital of the linen industry before the war was estimated at 16 million pounds, and the annual value of production at 25 million pounds. Seventy per cent. of the workers were women and girls, who earned average wages of 10/- for a full week of 55 hours.

The shipbuilding industry was established in Belfast as far back as 1859 by the firm of Harland and Wolff, which became one of the biggest shipbuilding concerns in the world. During the war the total tonnage built amounted to nearly

half a million tons, and in 1919 the firm was employing 21,000 workers. Enormous profits were made in the post-war boom but figures were not published because up to 1924 Harland and Wolff remained a private company. Its prosperity is shown by the fact that paid-up capital was increased from £600,000 in 1913 to over £10,000,000 in 1924. The company controls various subsidiary undertakings, including tobacco factories and the Belfast Ropeworks Co.

Dublin has one industry which has brought extraordinarily high profits to its owners, most of whom, like the large landowners, have English connections and have invested their profits in enterprises outside Ireland.

The brewery company owned by Arthur Guinness, Son & Co. had the following directors, among others, in 1913:—

- Viscount Iveagh (E. C. Guinness) and his two sons
- Rupert Guinness, Conservative M.P. since 1908 and director of the L. & N. W. Railway Co.
- Walter Guinness, Conservative M.P. since 1907, and afterwards Minister of Agriculture in the Baldwin Government.
- Lord Revelstoke, a director of Baring Bros., and of the Bank of England.

The paid up capital was £7,000,000, including £5,000,000 in ordinary shares, half of which had been distributed to shareholders as a 100 per cent. bonus in 1908. Up to that year dividends ranged from 20 to 27 per cent. On the doubled capital 14 to 16½ per cent. was paid until 1919, and 20 per cent. in 1920. In 1923 a further bonus of £2,500,000 was distributed. Net profits in 1913 amounted to over a million pounds, all of which was made out of the labour of only 5,000 Dublin workers, earning average wages of about £1 a week. Every worker, therefore, produced £200 a year in profits, and earned £50 in wages; in a 50 hour week he was working 40 hours for his employers and 10 hours for himself. The Dublin brewery worker was no less exploited than the peasant who worked four-fifths of the year to pay rent, tithes and taxes.

Apart from these manufactures the most important large scale industry in Ireland is transport. The total value of imports and exports in 1907 was over £120,000,000; by 1913 it was £140,000,000, and around this trade had grown up a transport industry, including railways, docks and road transport which, with the allied occupations of storing, packing, etc., employed large numbers of workers. Except for some grades of railwaymen, who were members of the Irish section of the Railway Servants' Society (afterwards the National

Union of Railwaymen) there was very little organisation among transport workers or unskilled workers in any occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Irish Trade Union Congress was established in 1894; at its second Congress at Cork in 1895 there were 150 delegates representing 50,000 members of unions. Nearly all of these were small craft organisations, such as the Coachmakers, Saddlers, Cabinet Makers, Flax Dressers, and others, which were not at all concerned with the mass organisation of workers in the class struggle but operated as friendly societies for small groups of craftsmen.

In the year after the Cork Congress a new influence came into Irish working-class organisation. James Connolly, who was employed as a navvy in Dublin, founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party. Its programme included:—

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. Agriculture to be administered as a public function, under boards of management elected by the agricultural population. (Ryan *Irish Labour Movement*. p. 148.)

In 1903 Connolly emigrated to America, where he continued his activities in the Socialist movement. He returned to Ireland to take part in the great struggle of the Irish working class which led up to the crisis of 1913. In this struggle the unskilled workers, first in Belfast and then in Dublin, played the leading part.

In 1907 Larkin was sent to Belfast as Organiser of the British National Union of Dock Labourers. In June the first big strike ever known in Belfast began. It started with a demand for an increase in dockers' wages, and rapidly extended to include carters and some sections of railwaymen. The claim put forward by the carters shows the conditions against which unskilled workers were organising; they demanded 26/- for a 60 hour week, and this represented a weekly increase of 5/-. The employers gave notice of a lock-out, and refused to deal with the representative of the union.

On July 30th troops were brought into Belfast; the police who had shown sympathy with the strike were removed to other districts, and the Government proceeded to crush the strike by armed force. On August 11 cavalry and bayonet charges took place in the Falls Road (a Catholic working-class district, at some distance from the dock area); on the 12th fighting continued for five hours in the same district, the troops firing on the unarmed workers. Handbills were posted

in the Falls area calling on the workers to maintain their solidarity.

Not as Catholics or Protestants, as Nationalists, or Unionists, but as Belfast men and workers stand together and don't be misled by the employers' game of dividing Catholic and Protestant. (*Northern Whig*, August 14, 1907.)

It was not the Belfast workers but the English officials of the National Union of Dock Labourers, and particularly James Sexton, who were responsible for the surrender that followed. Larkin was not consulted on the terms of settlement.

In 1909 the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union was formed with headquarters in Dublin. When Larkin was imprisoned in 1910, on a charge of misappropriation of funds, Connolly carried on the work of organisation, and after Larkin's release the two worked together. Connolly writing in the "New Age" said:

Our attitude always was that in the swiftness and unexpectedness of our action lay our chief hopes of temporary victory, and since permanent peace was an illusory hope until permanent victory was secured, temporary victories were all that need concern us.

Industrial Unionism as the weapon of the working class movement, and the Socialist Republic as its aim, became the central points of every campaign. In 1911 a strike of sailors and firemen was led by the T. and G. W. U., and the struggle extended to Wexford, Waterford, and Belfast. In the same year the weekly paper, the "Irish Worker," was started, with Larkin as editor. Its circulation increased steadily from 26,000 in June to 95,000 in September. Big strikes were taking place in England; the London and Liverpool dock strikes and the railway strike (in which Irish railwaymen were involved) in 1911, and the miners' strike in 1912.

In both countries the wave of militant activity among the mass of workers was rising. In England most of the trade union leaders were trying to restrict the struggle and to secure sectional settlements; in Ireland, under the leadership of Connolly and Larkin, the conflict was being continually widened and new groups of workers were being brought into action.

The general conditions of the Dublin working class were appalling. In 1912 there were 21,000 families living in one-room tenements, and the death rate was the highest in the British Isles. In 1913 two Dublin houses occupied by 25 families collapsed and between 20 and 30 people were buried in the ruins. According to the "Times" report "There are many old tumble-down houses all over the district which are

inhabited by very poor working people" (Sept. 4, 1913). Men were working for 14/- for a 70 hour week, and women for 11/- for anything from 50 to 90 hours (W. P. Ryan, *Labour Revolt and Larkinism*, p. 14).

The year 1913 opened with a series of strikes, and the employers' hatred of the I.T.G.W.U. became more bitter and more active. Between January and August there were 30 strikes in Dublin. The Employers' Federation, founded in 1911, determined, under the leadership of W. M. Murphy, to break "Larkin's" Union. Murphy had been a prominent anti-Parnellite M.P.. He was now Chairman of the Dublin United Tramways Co., owner of a daily paper, the "Irish Independent," and Chairman of the Employers' Federation.

In August tramwaymen, who were members of the T.G.W.U., were threatened with dismissal. Immediately there was a strike of tramway workers. Dublin employers thereupon combined to compel all workers to sign the following pledge:—

I hereby undertake to carry out all instructions given to me by or on behalf of my employers, and, further, I agree to immediately resign my membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (if a member); and I further undertake that I will not join or in any way support this Union. (Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland*, p. 244)

This open attack brought thousands of workers into the strike, which involved 37 unions and lasted for six months. Sympathetic strike action spread from one group to another. Workers employed by the firm which distributed Murphy's "Irish Independent" came out in support of the tramwaymen; girls at Jacob's biscuit factory joined the struggle against the Employers' Federation, of which G. N. Jacob was a prominent member.

On August 23 Larkin and four others were arrested, but were released on bail. A mass meeting was announced to take place on Sunday, August 31, and was proclaimed by the Government.

The English "Daily Herald," which in those days was on the side of the working class, attacked the Irish Nationalist Party for its support of the employers.

Not a solitary member of the Irish Party has appeared on any Irish Transport Union platform, or protested against the arrest of Larkin and his friends, or helped the tramway workers in any way whatever (August 30, 1913).

It became clear that the English and the Irish capitalist class were united against the workers, and that they were

equally ready to use the armed forces of the British Government to defeat the strike. The "Times" a few weeks later said:

To-day Mr. Murphy's Press and the official Nationalist Press are at one in condemning Larkinism (October 4, 1913).

According to another writer:

The small Sinn Fein section violently opposed Larkin, and Arthur Griffith talked of having the strikers bayoneted (L. O'Flaherty, *Life of Tim Healy*, p. 231).

On August 30 and 31 there were repeated police charges in the streets, fiercely resisted by the strikers. During the two days 400 were injured, including numbers of women and children, and there were 80 arrests. Troops were called out to support the police.

In the following week the British Trades Union Congress met at Manchester. An Irish deputation attended to report on the Dublin strike. Smillie of the Miners' Federation spoke of a general strike in England as the best means of support, but moved no resolution. The Congress accepted a proposal by Tom Shaw that a British deputation of six

be sent to Dublin to address meetings in favour of free speech, the right of organisation, and free meetings, and that they inquire into the allegation of police brutality (*Times*, Sept. 3).

The English deputation had two meetings with the Irish employers, who continued their attack quite regardless of the speeches of T.U.C. representatives.

In September the British T.U.C. sent food ships to Dublin carrying supplies for the strikers. At the same time they secured a Government inquiry. Several British trade union officials attended on behalf of their unions, including Gosling of the Transport Workers, who urged that the inquiry should be held in private. T. M. Healy, who afterwards became the first Governor-General of the Irish Free State, appeared as counsel for the employers. Healy led the attack on the Irish Transport Union, which was represented by Larkin and Connolly (both newly released from prison). He declared that

With the exception of the Reign of Terror in Paris, there had been nothing to compare with the present state of things in Dublin (*Times*, October 2).

The Commission proposed a settlement on the basis of conciliation committees; the employers rejected the proposal, and the struggle went on.

From this time the division between the English trade union officials and the rank and file of the workers in Eng-

land and Ireland became more marked. The Miners' Federation, which was then the most powerful and the most militant of the British Trade Unions, voted £1,000 a week for the Irish strike as long as it lasted; but the leaders of the Labour Party and of the English Transport Workers' Union were constantly looking for a settlement. Gosling and others proposed to intervene, but the Irish Transport Workers rejected the offer. English blacklegs began to be brought over; fifty labourers sent from Lancashire had to be protected by forty police. A special Trades Union Congress was held in London at which a resolution in favour of a blockade of Dublin was rejected, on a card vote, by an overwhelming majority, and another delegation was appointed to interview the employers. In Ireland George Russell, one of the intellectuals of the Gaelic League, addressed an open letter to the Dublin employers, which secured great publicity.

But the employers, knowing that the whole of the Government forces were behind them, were untouched. At the end of January, 1914, the strike was called off without any general settlement.

The battle, in Connolly's words, was a drawn battle; but the Irish working class movement had secured something more than an industrial victory. The recognition of its Socialist aim was expressed at the Irish Trades Union Congress of 1914, in a resolution declaring that:

Labour unrest can only be ended by the abolition of the capitalist system of wealth-production with its inherent injustice and poverty,

and putting forward certain demands as first steps to that end. The use of the armed forces of the State on the side of the employers, and the alliance of bourgeois Nationalists with the British capitalist class against the workers, had shown once for all that the fight for freedom would never be won under the leadership of the possessing class. Further, it had shown that the workers must organise to meet the use of force. The Citizen Army, organised by Connolly, grew directly out of the experience of the strike. Finally, the struggle of 1913 made it clear that English and Irish workers must unite to destroy the British capitalist system. At times in the autumn of 1913 this unity seemed to the capitalist class to be dangerously near. It was averted for the moment, largely through the agency of English trade union leaders. Before it could be renewed, both Irish Nationalists and English trade unionists were enthusiastically recruiting armies for the imperialist war, by which the international working class was to be divided for years to come.



## CHAPTER V.

## SINN FEIN AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE.

While Irish workers in Dublin were fighting the battle of 1913 a contest was going on, at Westminster and elsewhere, over the question of Home Rule. Asquith's Home Rule Bill, giving Ireland local self-government, but leaving control of customs, defence, foreign policy, land purchase, and (for six years) police in the hands of the Imperial Government, was introduced in 1912. It was supported by Redmond and the Irish Party in the House of Commons. Immediately the Ulster bourgeoisie, whose English connections were so close that they preferred English to Irish administration even in local affairs, began to organise opposition. All the old methods of stirring up racial and religious antagonism were revived. In September, 1912, a Solemn League and Covenant was signed by over 200,000 Ulstermen in which they undertook

to stand by one another in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament.

Sir Edward Carson, a Conservative M.P., toured Ulster and inspected bodies of drilled and armed men numbering 80,000 to 100,000. Preparations for armed resistance were openly carried on, and Balfour and other Conservative ex-Ministers openly approved. An Ulster Provisional Government, with a Military Council, was set up. Carson contributed £10,000 to an indemnity fund for the Ulster Volunteers. Arms and ammunition were illegally imported from Hamburg, and 30,000 rifles were distributed in Ulster.

In October, 1913, the leaders of the Irish Volunteers, seeing all this activity in Ulster, began to reorganise their forces, with headquarters in Dublin. A circular was issued stating that their purpose was "to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland." Constitutional Nationalists—supporters of the Parliamentary group led by Redmond—and revolutionary Nationalists joined up. By the middle of 1914 the Irish Volunteers numbered nearly 100,000 and were increasing at the rate of 15,000 a week. John McNeill, a Professor in the National University,



and Roger Casement, formerly in the British Consular Service, were among the active organisers of the Irish Volunteers.

The war brought about a sharp definition of the relation between the various sections in Ireland and British imperialist interests.

The fact that the Home Rule Act was on the Statute Book made it easier for Redmond and the Irish Nationalist Party at Westminster to declare their loyalty to the imperialist cause. In the House of Commons Redmond announced that the Government might withdraw all troops from Ireland. The Nationalist Volunteers and the Ulster Volunteers would defend the country together.

The large majority of the existing Irish Volunteers followed Redmond's lead. They became known as National Volunteers, and when Redmond undertook a recruiting tour in Ireland thousands of workers and peasants joined up in the British Army. In Ulster the Carsonites were naturally able to enlist their supporters on the side of imperialism.

The organisations which were definitely anti-British from the beginning of the war included (1) those members of the Irish Volunteers who refused to follow Redmond's lead; (2) Sinn Féin; (3) the Socialist Party, with which was closely associated the Citizen Army. At first only a small section of the existing Volunteers opposed Redmond's policy. But from the beginning of 1915 the membership of this section increased rapidly, and as the war went on many who had followed Redmond joined the Irish Volunteers. From the first, two distinct political tendencies were evident within their ranks. One section, under the leadership of McNeill, although it supported the building up of the Volunteers as an independent body, held that an Irish rising should not be attempted during the war. The other section, whose leaders were associated with the Irish Republican Brotherhood (surviving from Fenian days) were in favour of immediate insurrection. Among these leaders was Thomas Clarke who had spent sixteen years in a British prison for his Fenian activities.

The Sinn Féin Party was still numerically small. It had been founded in 1905 by a group of intellectuals as a political party which was to be independent of the English Parliament. It combined the literary tradition of the Young Ireland Movement with Irish revivalism and a policy which was less nationalist than purely anti-English. Arthur Griffith, editor of the journal "Sinn Féin," had attacked Larkin in the strikes of 1907 to 1913, as the "English strike organiser," and had published an article by one of his own followers declaring that English trade unionists organised strikes in Ireland in order

to divert trade to England ("Sinn Fein," March 30, 1907). An article called "The English-made Strike" said:

Against the Red Flag of Communism. . . . we raise the flag of an Irish nation. Under that flag there will be protection, safety and freedom for all (Sept. 30, 1911).

An editorial reply to a letter published during the 1913 strike declared that as long as any section of Irishmen could be led to think "that there is no colourable differences between the green flag of Irish Nationalism and the red banner of English socialism, so long will such a section of Irishmen be cat-paws of England."

While Griffith's organ condemned socialism for being English, the Republican Sinn Feiners were prepared to condemn capitalism for the same reason. "Irish Freedom," the organ of the Republicans, expressed the view that "the primary evil is the English occupation" and that "the cleansing of Ireland from the foreigner will involve the abolition of his inhuman and degrading social system" (December, 1913).

Some of the Republican section of Sinn Fein supported joint action by Nationalists and Socialists. Among them were P. H. Pearse and De Valera. After the Redmond split many of their followers joined the Irish Volunteers, who became known as Sinn Fein Volunteers.

The only group which was attempting, from the beginning of the war, to build up an anti-imperialist organisation on a working-class basis, was the Socialist group, led by Connolly. In November, 1914, Larkin left Ireland for America, and the leadership of the militant trade union movement and the Citizen Army from now on was in Connolly's hands. He worked in close alliance with the left wing of the Volunteers, and from the first saw that the war situation must be used for an attack on British imperialist power in Ireland. In the first few weeks of the war he wrote in the "Irish Worker"

The Irish working-class sees no abandonment of the principles of the Labour movement in the fight against this war and all it implies; sees no weakening of international solidarity in their fierce resolve to do no fighting except it be in their own country (Oct. 31, 1914).

The "Irish Worker" was suppressed by the Government in December, 1914. It was followed for a time by the "Workers' Republic," printed in Glasgow.

In the columns of the "Workers' Republic," Connolly laid bare the efforts of "loyal capitalists" to compel the Irish to "fight the battles of the tottering British Empire." Conscription by starvation was going on in Dublin—workers were

"released" so that they might join the British Army. The recruiters were the men who had pledged themselves to smash trade unionism by starvation.

On every recruiting platform in Dublin you can see the faces of the men who in 1913-14 met together day by day to tell of their plans to murder our women and children by starvation. . . . They are the men who set the police upon the unarmed people in O'Connell Street, who filled the jails with young working-class girls, who batoned and imprisoned hundreds of Dublin workers. . . . These are the recruiters. Every man or boy who joins at their call gives these carrion a fresh victory over the Dublin working class—over the working class of all Ireland (Feb. 26, 1916).

Throughout the year 1915 preparations for an armed rising had been going on within the Volunteer organisation. Arrangements were made to get supplies of munitions from Germany through Sir Roger Casement, who had gone to Berlin at the beginning of the war. On March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, 1916, a parade of armed Volunteers took place in Dublin. A general rising was planned for Easter, 1916. This was officially agreed to by the Executive of the Volunteers, of which McNeill was President, although many of the members, including McNeill himself, had always advocated delay and proposed to wait until after the war.

The main support of the revolutionary rising was in the towns; in Cork there was a strong body of armed Volunteers, in Enniscorthy (Wexford) and in Kilkenny Volunteer organisation had been active, and in Dublin the Citizen Army and the Volunteers were well armed and splendidly organised. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland, the Irish Volunteers numbered between 13,000 and 14,000 in December, 1915, and "steadily increased in number and discipline" from then until April. In the country as a whole, except among the peasants and agricultural workers of Galway, there was very little organised support, so that when at the last moment the counter-revolutionary forces within the Volunteer movement abandoned the fight, the militant section was quickly isolated.

On the night of April 20th a German auxiliary, disguised as a Norwegian timber ship, attempted to land arms and ammunition on the Irish coast. The vessel was challenged by a British ship, and was almost immediately sunk by her own crew. According to an Admiralty statement "the auxiliary sank, and a number of prisoners were made, amongst whom was Sir Roger Casement." Casement was taken to the Tower of London, and tried on a charge of high treason. He was executed on August 3rd, 1916.

The news of Casement's arrest and the loss of the supply

of munitions gave the pretext for attempting to check the rising. On Saturday, April 22nd, a countermanding order was issued by McNeill in the following terms:—

Owing to the very critical position, all orders given to Irish Volunteers for to-morrow, Easter Sunday, are hereby rescinded, and no parades, marches, or other movements of Irish Volunteers will take place. Each individual Volunteer will obey this order strictly in every particular.

In Cork during the week-end several contradictory messages were received, plans were completely disorganised and no rising took place. In Dublin the Citizen Army and the revolutionary section of the Volunteers carried out the plan alone. On Easter Monday the Post Office, the Four Courts, Westland Row Station, Boland's Mill (on the south side of the river, where de Valera was in command), and a large number of houses at strategic points were occupied. Attempts were made to hold every railway terminus; when it was found that this was impossible the lines were cut and the bridges destroyed, so that Dublin was cut off from approach by railway for a week. Barricades were erected on all the main roads leading into the town. The Post Office was the chief centre, and the garrisons there and in other positions were well provisioned. Connolly and Pearse were in command at the Post Office. Posters were issued proclaiming the establishment of the Irish Republic, signed on behalf of the Provisional Government by Thomas Clarke, P. H. Pearse, James Connolly, and four others. The proclamation declared

the right of the Irish people to the ownership of the land, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and inalienable. . . . the Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

All telegraph wires were cut; but the telephone exchange was not captured, and was used throughout by the military. On Tuesday military reinforcements began to arrive, and there was fierce fighting in many parts of the town, particularly at St. Stephen's Green, which was held by the Volunteers under Countess Markievicz, in spite of machine gun fire from surrounding houses. On Tuesday night martial law was proclaimed. The next day

more troops, with artillery, were continually arriving in the city, and after a short rest they were brought into action, but they had to fight for every foot of ground they gained (*Weekly Irish Times, Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook*).

An Admiralty steamer came up the river and bombarded Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the Transport and General Workers' Union, although it was not occupied by revolutionary troops. According to the "Weekly Times" report, Liberty Hall had been a thorn in the side of the Dublin police and the Irish Government for years, and "when it was determined to use artillery to defeat the rebels, Liberty Hall was singled out for the first target."

All through Thursday and Friday the bombardment of the centre of the town continued. Numbers of buildings were set on fire, and whole blocks of shops and offices were destroyed. The garrison were forced to evacuate the General Post Office, of which all but the outer shell was burnt.

On Saturday, April 29th, the leaders of the rising agreed on unconditional surrender. The following document was signed by P. H. Pearse as President of the Provisional Government:—

In order to prevent further slaughter of unarmed people and in the hope of saving the lives of our followers, now surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered, members of the Provisional Government at present at headquarters have agreed to unconditional surrender, and the commanders of all units of the Republican forces will order their followers to lay down their arms.

The following day General Maxwell, in command of the British forces, reported that a flying column was being sent out "to stimulate the surrender of parties in the country." There were a thousand prisoners in Dublin, of whom nearly half were immediately sent to England. The following instruction was issued on May 2nd:—

Reports as to the shooting without trial of any rebels after their surrender may be denied in the Press. Trials are not yet completed.

It was known that during the rising civilians who had taken no part in the fighting were shot by British soldiers. In North King Street the bodies of two men were found buried in a cellar, and although the military authorities did their best to maintain that they were killed in the course of fighting, the prisoners had been shot. (*Weekly Times Handbook*, p. 29). Coroner's Jury found that "unarmed and unoffending" Sheehy Skeffington, a well-known pacifist, and two other journalists, were shot without trial at Portobello Barracks by order of an officer who was afterwards court-martialled and sentenced to be detained as a criminal lunatic.

The official casualty list stated that there were 300 killed and 997 wounded. Of these 180 killed and 614 wounded were described as "civilians and insurgents," the others being

military and police. It was admitted that these figures were incomplete. Of the prisoners who were tried by court-martial fifteen were shot, including all the seven who signed the declaration of the Irish Republic. When all but two of these sentences had been carried out, Dillon of the Nationalist Party protested in the House of Commons against further executions. At the same time the "Irish Independent," owned by W. M. Murphy, demanded (May 10) "Let the ringleaders be singled out"; a second article stated that "Certain of the ringleaders remain undealt with," and asked "Are they to get off lightly?" One of the two was Connolly, who had been severely wounded in the fighting. Murphy and the Dublin Employers' Federation had not forgotten his part in the 1913 strike. On May 12th Connolly was taken out on a stretcher and lifted into a chair to be shot, by order of the British Government, of which Arthur Henderson of the British Labour Party was a member.

The Government had singled out the militant leaders. Others, including McNeill, De Valera, and Countess Markievicz, were sentenced to penal servitude for life, scores of others to shorter terms of imprisonment. Over three thousand prisoners passed through Richmond Barracks. Most of the interned prisoners were released at Christmas, 1916, and those who were serving sentences were released later under a general amnesty.

The official Labour movement in Ireland held aloof from the rising. A report issued afterwards by the Irish T.U.C. and Labour Party stated that:—

In the actual fighting it is certain that the majority of the insurgents were trade unionists, although no union, as such, had any part in the insurrection (Reports prepared for Second International, 1919, p. 17).

The Executive Committee's report to the Annual Conference in August, 1916, showed that letters had been sent to Henderson and Asquith, protesting against the arrest of Skeffington, and of William O'Brien, P. T. Daly, and two others who "took no part in the outbreak." Thomas Johnson, in his presidential address, said that the Conference was not the place to discuss "the right or the wrong, the wisdom or the folly of the revolt" (Report, p. 21).

At the British Trades Union Congress (September, 1916) one delegate referred to the shooting of Skeffington; there

was no other reference to the Easter rising. At the British Labour Party Conference (January 1917) the Parliamentary report mentioned it as "the calamitous outbreak in Ireland." British Labour leaders had completely adopted the attitude of the ruling class and gave no sign of support to the Irish workers in their struggle.

The "Socialist Review," organ of the British Independent Labour Party, definitely repudiated the rising. An editorial statement in September, 1916, said:—

We do not approve of the revolt of the Sinn Feiners.. We do not approve of any armed revolt, as we do not approve of any form of militarism and war.

(It should be noted that Sinn Fein was not officially concerned in the rising, although through the Irish Volunteer organisation some Sinn Feiners took part in it.)

Socialists in other countries condemned the Easter rising as the rash attempt of a small group having no support from the mass of the people. Lenin, answering these, wrote in 1916:—

Whoever describes this rebellion as a "putsch" is either the worst kind of reactionary, or so doctrinaire as to be hopelessly incapable of imagining a social revolution as a living phenomenon. (*Collected Works*, XIII, p. 429).

In Ireland the rising was followed by a new wave of nationalism intensified by the Government proposal to enforce conscription in Ireland. Sinn Fein began to organise its forces no longer as a small group of intellectuals, but on the basis of a wide campaign of political activity, and aroused mass support all through the south and west. When it was proposed by the British Government early in 1917 that an Irish Convention, representing all parties, should be held, Sinn Fein refused to take part. By-elections were contested for the first time since the war by Sinn Fein candidates, and three elections were won in 1917. Continued acts of repression by the Government strengthened nationalist feeling. In September, 1917, Thomas Ashe, who had taken part in the Easter rising, and had been re-arrested under the Defence of the Realm Regulations, died as the result of forcible feeding during a hunger strike in Mountjoy Prison. His funeral was the occasion for a Sinn Fein demonstration on a scale hitherto unknown.

The period of the rapid rise of the Republican movement was also a period of increasing strength in the organised labour



movement. The membership of the Transport and General Workers' Union rose from 5,000 in April, 1916, to 12,000 in the autumn of 1917, and 68,000 at the end of 1918, including 20,000 farm labourers. In April, 1918, when the Act extending conscription to Ireland came into force, Sinn Fein and organised labour presented a united front against its application. A special Labour Conference, attended by 1,500 delegates from all parts of Ireland, was held in Dublin, and decided on a one-day strike. Four days later, on April 23, a complete stoppage, including transport, factories, shops, and newspapers took place in all parts of Ireland outside the Belfast area. The Dublin Conference declared that Labour would resist conscription because "to sanction it would be to place in the hands of the Governments a power which could be used with deadly effect against the progress of the Labour Movement" (Report, 1918, p. 38). In June the application of conscription to Ireland was withdrawn by a proclamation issued by the Viceroy, Lord French.

The Parliamentary Irish Party, in a despairing effort to regain something of its lost influence in Ireland, had supported the no-conscription campaign. But the war had forced the Redmond Party to show exactly where it stood in relation to British imperialism, and the new nationalism had no use for the open adherents of British interests. At the General Election of December, 1918, the Westminster Irish Party was swept out of existence.

The Irish Labour Party, at a special Conference in November, 1918, decided by 96 votes to 23

in view of the necessity of deciding one issue, and only one issue, that of self-determination, to refrain from putting forward Labour Candidates for Parliament (Reports, 1918, 20).

Out of a total of 105 Irish seats, 26 in Ulster were held by Unionists. Of the rest 73 were won by Sinn Fein. Only six Redmondites were elected.

At the Sinn Fein Convention De Valera had been elected President, Griffith one of the Vice-Presidents, and McNeill, in spite of a protest from Countess Markievicz, a member of the Executive. Thus the Sinn Fein Movement was controlled by the representatives of bourgeois nationalism, which sought to establish an "Irish Ireland" for the exploitation of the Irish by the Irish. The Irish Labour movement, notwithstanding its theoretical socialism and its growing international consciousness, deliberately stood aside and allowed the leadership of the mass movement in Ireland to pass into the hands of men who had opposed and betrayed the Irish working



class. The Irish Labour Party and T.U.C. appointed delegates to the Stockholm International Conference in 1917; it welcomed the Bolshevik Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Republic (Report to 2nd International, pp. 26-28), vehemently protested "against the capitalist outlawing of the Soviet Republic of Russia," and called upon "the workers under the governments sharing in the crime to compel the evacuation of the occupied territory" (Report, 1918, p. 120). Through its delegates to the International Conference at Berne in 1919 it demanded the recognition of the Easter Week Proclamation of the Irish Republic, thereby sharply contrasting its policy with the "Home Rule under the Government of England attitude of British Labour" (Report, 1919, p. 23). But in the actual course of the struggle in Ireland in the next three years organised labour lost sight of the Workers' Republic as its own goal. The Labour Party made no attempt to extend the transport strike against the carrying of munitions in 1920. On the contrary, the strike was called off by the Executive after six months, on the ground that as a demonstration it had lasted long enough, and that funds were running low. Those who fought to the last for complete independence were isolated from the mass of the workers, and at no stage was the struggle of 1919 to 1922 directed by a class-conscious proletarian party.

In January, 1919, thirty of the newly elected Sinn Fein M.P.'s (many of the others being in prison) met in Dublin as an Irish Parliament. The assembly, which was called by its Irish name—Dail Eireann—issued a declaration of independence, demanded the withdrawal of the British garrison, and appointed its own Ministers on the model of the British Government. The Dail was at once declared illegal by the British Government, and carried on its work in secret. Courts were set up, and a system of taxation was adopted. By degrees a whole "illegal" system of administration was built up. The Irish Volunteers, now known as the Irish Republican Army, took over the ordinary duties of the police, and enforced the decisions of the Parish and District Arbitration Courts.

The general aim was to create an independent state machine, and to boycott the whole British apparatus. But that the new State machine still served to maintain the power of the capitalist class was evident in its entire constitution, which adopted all the methods of bourgeois democracy. The co-operative system was allowed to continue within the framework of capitalism, but the Sinn Fein Government, like its predecessors, opposed the confiscation of the land and suppressed all attempts at agrarian revolution. The following

account is given in a pamphlet issued by the Sinn Fein Ministry for Home Affairs in 1921:—

While the I.R.A. was establishing their authority as a national police, a grave danger threatened the foundations of the Republic. This was the recrudescence in an acute form of an agrarian agitation for the breaking up of the great grazing ranches into tillage holdings for landless men and "uneconomic" small holders. . . . Emigration had been dammed up for five years, while an immense rise in the value of land and farm products threw into more vivid relief than ever before the high profits of the ranchers and the hopeless outlook of the landless men and uneconomic holders. The latter, during the winter 1919-20, began to take the matter into their own hands. Gradually a spirit of violence, inherited from centuries of agrarian serfdom in which violence had been the only resource, crept in. . . . All this was a grave menace to the Republic. The mind of the people was being diverted from the struggle for freedom by a class war. . . . There was a moment when it seemed that nothing could prevent wholesale expropriation. But this crisis was surmounted, thanks to a patriotic public opinion, and the civic sense of justice expressed through the Arbitration Courts and enforced by the Republican police.

( *Constructive Work of Dail Eireann No. 1* ).

A second pamphlet describes how "terrified landowners flocked up to Dublin to beseech protection from the Dail," and gives details of the first case which came before a special Land Court. A number of small holders claimed land on a farm of about 100 acres, held jointly by two farmers. The Court decided against the small holders, but these people defied the order of the Court, and remained in possession of the disputed land.

One night, about a fortnight after the issue of the judgment, the Captain of the local company of the I.R.A. descended upon them with a squad of his men—sons of very poor farmers like themselves—arrested four of them, and brought them off to that very effective Republican prison—an unknown destination!

( *Constructive Work of Dail Eireann No. 2* ).

Thus Sinn Fein stood for the landowning class against the poor peasants. But it was fighting for increased power for the Irish bourgeoisie, and was, therefore, a danger to British interests. The British Government's determination to suppress the Sinn Fein administration and all its local activities led to ever-increasing violence on the part of the British. The Irish met force with force, and the situation developed into a reign of terror conducted by British police and troops in an attempt to defeat the guerilla warfare of the Irish.

For more than two years the Anglo-Irish war was car-

ried on between a small number (according to Sir James O'Connor, never more than 2,000) of armed Irishmen, organised in the Irish Republican Army, and British Government forces. I.R.A. activities were directed at first against the police and police barracks. According to Dan Breen, who played a leading part in the whole campaign, neither then nor at any later stage did Dail Eireann accept responsibility for the war against the British. . . . It was later publicly admitted both in the second Republican Dail and in the Free State Dail that the I.R.A. was left to carry on the war on its own initiative, on its own resources, without either approval or disapproval from the Government of the Republic. (Dan Breen's Book, p. 145).

The attacks of the I.R.A. were met by redoubled brutality on the part of British Government agents. Early in 1920 reinforcements were sent to Ireland. Numbers of R.I.C. men had resigned, and it had been found impossible to continue recruiting in Ireland for the police. The new forces were the Auxiliaries (ex-officers of the British Army) and military police, known as Black-and-Tans, recruited from English ex-soldiers and "known criminals or ex-convicts." (Dan Breen). Figures published at the time in the Irish daily Press showed that in 1920, in addition to murders and woundings of unarmed citizens, the following acts of violence were carried out by British forces:

Raids on houses and institutions ... ..	48,474
Homes deliberately destroyed or damaged ...	876
Shops deliberately destroyed or damaged ...	965
Factories and Creameries " " " " "	58

Details of forty-two Co-operative Creameries and other Societies "stated to have been destroyed or damaged by armed forces of the Crown" up to November, 1920, were given in the Report of the Commission which visited Ireland on behalf of the British Labour Party at the end of 1920. The Report contained evidence from numbers of witnesses of reprisals by Black-and-Tans.

According to a statement by General Macready, who was in command of the British forces in Ireland from March, 1920, unauthorised reprisals were deliberately permitted by the British Government.

*Early in October the Government began to feel somewhat anxious as to the effect of unauthorised reprisals on public feeling in England, and the Chief Secretary was told to check the activities of the police in that direction.*

*(Macready, *Annals of an Active Life* II., 502-3).*

During the Black-and-Tan regime curfew orders were in force, compelling people to be in their houses by eight o'clock, and it was during the night that terrorist raids were carried

out, the Black-and-Tans dragging men, women and children from their beds, and beating, shooting and arresting people without warning and generally without charge of any kind. In March 1920 the Sinn Fein Lord Mayor of Cork, Thomas McCurtin, was murdered by the police. He was succeeded by Terence MacSwiney, who carried on the work of administration in Cork, one of the chief centres of Sinn Fein activity. In August MacSwiney was arrested. He denied the legality of a trial in a British Court, and made no defence. He was taken to Brixton prison, and at once went on hunger strike. The British Government had determined to break the hunger strike as a weapon of political prisoners. MacSwiney died in October, 1920, after a hunger strike of ten weeks.

The terror in Cork went on. The Report of the Labour Commission gives the following figures:

During the month of November alone we were informed by the Cork City Council that over 200 Curfew arrests had been made, four Sinn Fein Clubs burnt to the ground twelve large business premises destroyed by fire (in addition to attempts made to fire others, including the City Hall); seven men shot dead, a dozen men dangerously wounded, fifteen trains held up, four publicly placarded threats to the citizens of Cork issued, and over 500 houses of private citizens forcibly entered and searched (p. 33).

In Dublin, in the same month, British forces were responsible for the Croke Park massacre. Auxiliaries and police fired on a crowd at a football match. Twelve people were killed and 61 injured. In an official statement on November 23, the Secretary for Ireland said that a round-up of spectators had been planned "with the object of securing Sinn Fein gun-men who had taken part in the assassinations of that morning of fourteen British officials in Dublin." The situation in Southern Ireland gave rise to a terror almost as violent in Belfast. In June, 1920, a series of attacks by Orangemen on Catholic workers began, after the shooting in Cork of an Ulsterman who was an officer in the R.I.C. For nearly two years shooting and other acts of violence were almost daily events in Belfast.

In December, 1920, a new Home Rule Bill was passed in the House of Commons, setting up a separate Parliament for six counties of Ulster. Sinn Fein refused to operate the Act, but the Northern Parliament was opened in June, 1921.

A month later a truce was agreed to between de Valera, on behalf of the Dail, and the British Government, and the way was prepared for the Treaty of December, 1921, by which a new administration was established in the twenty-six counties of South-West Ireland, known henceforth as the Irish Free State.

## CHAPTER VI.

## TOWARDS A WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' REPUBLIC.

In 1921 it had become vitally necessary for British imperialist interests to re-establish bourgeois government in Ireland on a firm footing. The recent evidence that, in spite of the Land Acts, the forces of agrarian revolution were not dead; the revolutionary experience of the working-class in 1913 and in the rising of 1916; the widespread spirit of revolt in the period of the Anglo-Irish war; all these were forces which, under a proletarian leadership, might develop into a new and much more dangerous challenge to imperialism.

British capitalism had entered on a period of extreme difficulty, when the contradiction of enormously increased productive capacity and shrinking markets was giving rise to acute conflicts both with the working class at home and with capitalist rivals in other countries. Through the setting up of the Free State Government, the agents and allies of imperialism were established in Ireland at the cost of certain minor concessions, but without endangering the essential economic and strategic interests of British capitalism.

When the terms of the Treaty were under discussion De Valera put forward an alternative draft known as Document No. 2. It differed from the terms actually agreed on in form rather than substance, and attempted to conceal the policy of entering into a working alliance with Imperialism. The Treaty, which was passed in the Dail by 64 votes to 57, and signed in December, 1921, gave to the Free State the same position in relation to the imperial Government as the Dominion of Canada. The chief concession, as compared with previous Home Rule Bills, was that control of taxation, including Customs and Excise, was handed over to the Free State Government, which could, therefore, impose protective duties. But as Ireland, outside Ulster (which pays British taxes), has few manufacturing industries, this provision does not seriously threaten British interests.

Defence at sea, apart from coastal defence, remains under imperial control, and Irish defence forces in proportion to British military forces may not exceed the proportion of Irish to British population. In time of war or "strained relations" the Free State must give such harbour and other

facilities as the British Government may require. The Free State Government is responsible for compensation to discharged British police and other officials (except the Black-and-Tans), for payments on British Loans, and for collection of land annuities.

The Six Counties of Northern Ireland, with a population of 1½ million, were excluded from the provisions of the Treaty, and the Act of 1920, establishing a separate Parliament and administration, was confirmed. Northern Ireland has a House of Commons of 52 members, and also sends 13 members to Westminster. Taxation, defence, and land purchase are controlled by the imperial Government.

Opposition to the Treaty developed into the Civil War of the next fifteen months. Its underlying force was rooted in the land-hunger of the small farmers, which had been suppressed but not satisfied, and in the general lowering of working class conditions. In December, 1921, over 25 per cent. of insured workers in the Free State area were totally unemployed, and among agricultural and other workers, not covered by National Insurance, the depression was equally severe. Agrarian agitation went on, and in some districts groups of workers, without central leadership or organisation, attempted to seize not only land, but other productive enterprises. In Limerick, members of the I.T. and G.W.U. on strike for an increase of wages, had taken possession (in May, 1920), of a creamery owned by a private company, and carried on the business themselves. Miners in Leitrim attempted to take over one of the mines.

Soldiers of the Irish Republican Army who supported the Treaty, and were now called the Free State Army, were used to put down these attempts, and the Executive of the T. and G. W. U. showed its allegiance to the new agents of capitalism by disowning the activities of the rank and file.

There was no proletarian party whose leadership could draw together the scattered forces of resistance. The actual fighting in the Civil War was conducted by members of the I.R.A. who saw in the Treaty a betrayal of the struggle for national independence, not a consolidation of the defences of capitalism. For many months they carried on a desperate struggle against the new Government.

In March, 1922, these I.R.A. forces (called Irregulars by the supporters of the Free State) seized Limerick Barracks, and within a few weeks they were holding the Four Courts and other buildings in Dublin. Michael Collins, who had allied himself with the extreme anti-British section of the I.R.A. in the Anglo-Irish War, was now a member of the Free State Government. By his orders the Four Courts

were shelled by Free State troops on June 28, 1922, with guns borrowed from the British, and the I.R.A. forces surrendered. Up to July, 1922, there were 61 killed and 274 wounded in the fighting between Free State troops and the I.R.A. in Dublin. Among the prisoners taken at the surrender of the Four Courts was Liam Mellows, who had led the 1916 rising in Galway. During his imprisonment Mellows issued a statement urging the necessity of setting up a Provisional Republican Government immediately, and showing that

The employment question is acute. Starvation is facing thousands of people. The official Labour movement has deserted the people for the flesh-pots of Empire. The Free State's Government's attitude towards striking postal workers makes clear what its attitude towards workers generally will be. The situation created by all these must be utilised for the Republic.—  
(*Irish Independent* Sept., 1922).

Mellows and others were shot as rebels, not by the British Government, but by its servant, the Government of the Free State. The British Government in 1916 executed 15 of the leaders of the Easter Rising; the number of political executions carried out by the Free State Government in 1922 was 77 (O'Connor, *History*, II., p. 355).

Thus the Free State Government established itself as the tool of imperialist power. Technically its position had been confirmed by the elections of June, 1922, when, by arrangement between the official section of Sinn Féin and the opposition led by de Valera, candidates were put forward on an agreed panel. As a result 94 of the panel candidates were elected and 34 other members, half of whom stood as Labour candidates and the rest as representatives of the Farmers' Party.

Michael Collins and other Sinn Féin leaders who identified themselves with the Free State administration attempted to defend their own action and to conceal from Irish and British workers the real function of the Government in relation to imperialism. Collins wrote in 1922:—

There is no British Government any longer in Ireland. It is gone. It is no longer the enemy. We have now a native Government. . . . Anyone who fails to obey it is an enemy of the people. . . . By means of the fight we put up. . . . we got the British to evacuate the country. Not only to evacuate it militarily, but to evacuate it socially and economically as well. (*Path to Freedom*, pages 25 and 110-111).

Is it true that Ireland is free, socially and economically, from British imperialism? The clearest answer can be found in an examination of the productive system of Ireland to-day, and of the class interests which are served by the Free State Government.



The total value of production in the Free State, according to the Census of Production of 1926, was 88 million pounds, of which 64 million pounds represented agricultural and 24 million pounds industrial production. This total is divided among (1) landowning interests (2) industrial, commercial and financial capitalists (3) working farmers (4) agricultural wage-earners (5) other wage-earners. The Census of Occupations for 1926 showed the following numbers of working farmers and wage-earners:—

Farmers and farmers' relatives (on farms of less than 50 acres) ... ..	390,000
Agricultural wage-earners ... ..	139,000
Wage-earners in other industries (excluding transport, the value of which is not included in the Census of Production) ... ..	270,000

It was stated in Chapter III., that a large part of the surplus value which was formerly absorbed in rent by big landlords is now taken in the form of interest on the loans raised under the Land Purchase Acts. The loans issued under the various Land Acts, and the amounts still outstanding, are shown below:—

Act	Date	Amount raised (million £)	Outstanding Interest (million £)	Rate p.c.
Land Purchase Act	1891	13.6	7.8	2½
Irish Land Act	1903	58.3	56.0	2½
Irish Land Acts 1903 & 1909		71.8	71.4	3
Irish Free State Land Act	1923			
Land Bond Act	1925	6.7	6.4	4½
N. Ireland Land Act	1925	3.8	3.7	4½
		<hr/> 154.2	<hr/> 145.3	

Annuities in payment of interest and repayment of principal are paid by farmers who are now described as "owners" of the land. Of the land purchased about one-sixth is in Ulster. Annuities in 1926 amounted to £3,250,000 in the Free State alone, where farms transferred under the Land Acts make up about three-quarters of the total agricultural land. A further amount of approximately £1,500,000 is paid in rent on unpurchased land.

In addition to the investors who take surplus value out of Irish agriculture in the form of interest and rent, there is



a large class of capitalist farmers who make direct profits out of agriculture by the exploitation of wage labour. There are 81,000 farms of more than 50 acres, and it on these farms that most of the agricultural wage-earners are employed.

Apart from agriculture, there are in the Free State 1,500 limited companies with a combined share capital of £36,000,000, and ten banks with a paid-up capital of £17,500,000 (Butler, "Irish Free State Economic Survey," U.S.A. Dept. of Commerce). But these do not represent nearly the whole of the enterprises exploiting wage-labour in industry; there are in addition a very large number of small undertakings which are not registered as limited companies.

In estimating the share of the value of production which is absorbed by the capitalist class, the amount of taxation has to be taken into account. The total tax revenue of the Free State is:—

Customs ... ..	£6,900,000
Excise ... ..	6,800,000
Income Tax ... ..	4,500,000
Estate Duties ... ..	1,100,000
Other ... ..	1,300,000
<b>Total ... ..</b>	<b>£20,600,000</b>

Income Tax and Estate Duties are taken out of industrial and agricultural profits already appropriated by the capitalists. But the sum of nearly 14 million pounds in indirect taxation (Customs and Excise) is taken from the whole population. At least £10 of this represents contributions from the working population to the upkeep of the State machine.

The approximate share taken by the various groups out of the total value of production may be summarised as follows:—

Taken by capital in	£
Interest on Land Loans (annuities)	3,250,000
Rent on unpurchased land	1,500,000
Interest on mortgages (agriculture)	1,500,000
Farming profits (large farms)	14,000,000
Taxation of workers and working farmers	10,000,000
Commercial Industrial profits	12,000,000
Commercial and Financial profits	11,000,000
	<b>£53,000,000</b>

## Taken by labour in:

Wages of agricultural workers (139,000 at £1 a week average)	7,000,000
Wages of other workers included in Census	12,000,000
Income of working farmers and relatives (390,000 at 26/- a week average)	26,000,000
	<hr/>
	£45,000,000
Less taxation taken back by capitalist class	10,000,000
	<hr/>
	£35,000,000

The profits of commercial and financial groups, amounting to £11 million, represent profits absorbed from transactions connected with agricultural produce. These groups share with the British bondholders and capitalist farmers the surplus value produced by Irish working farmers and agricultural wage-earners.

Industrial production in the Free State is still undeveloped. In 1926 the total value of output (apart from agriculture) was only 24 million pounds, and the number of workers employed as "producers, makers and repairers" in occupations other than agriculture was 186,000. The chief industry was brewing, which produced over 20 per cent. of the total value. The only other industry whose output reached 2 million pounds was building. The remaining figures represent a series of small enterprises mostly engaged in finishing trades. A list of new factories established in the Free State since 1925 shows that, out of a total of ninety, 45 were clothing factories, 13 confectionery, and 9 furniture-making. There was one brickworks, and one motor-factory—the Fordson Tractor Works in Cork.

Transport, trade and finance employ nearly as many workers as the whole series of productive industries. In 1926 the number engaged in transport was 65,000, in commerce and finance 85,000, and in clerical work (apart from public administration) 30,000; a total of 180,000. The total turnover of foreign trade is more than 100 million pounds each year, on which charges for collection, transport and distribution in Ireland must amount to approximately 10 million pounds. The Irish Free State, with less than half the population of London, is the fifth largest market in the world for British goods, and imports nearly half as much as India, which is the largest.

Transport and distribution, therefore, represent an important field for Irish investment as well as an essential service to British interests. This is one aspect of the alliance between the British and Irish capitalist class, which determines the character of the next stage in the Irish struggle. Further, the rail and road transport system of the Free State is jointly owned by British and Irish capital, while Free State banking is closely linked up with the banks of Northern Ireland, which are themselves very largely British-controlled.

The nationalist struggle in Ireland has passed through a series of stages, corresponding with changes in the country's productive forces. The bourgeois revolution at the end of the 18th century was defeated by British interests, industrialisation was checked, and Ireland in the early nineteenth century became a food-producing colony of England. In this period the agrarian struggle was intensified, until under the pressure of the Land League movement in the later 19th century a peasant proprietorship was set up, and the form of exploitation was altered. Commercial capital absorbed an increased share of the surplus value produced by the peasants, capitalist farming developed, and, in the years of general imperialist prosperity, some degree of capitalist accumulation in Ireland formed the basis for a new phase of production.

This was the period of the Home Rule movement, the political expression of bourgeois demands, including the need for independent control of taxation and trade policy. But the policy which suited the interests of the South, still mainly agricultural and commercial, was opposed by the industrialists of Belfast who were dependent on imported raw materials. From this division arose the Carsonite opposition to Home Rule, and the beginning of the policy of the partition of Ireland. The old religious and race differences between Ulster and the South provided the means of drawing large numbers of the population into a struggle which was essentially a conflict between different capitalist groups.

With the industrialisation of the North and the growth of transport as a large-scale industry in the South, a tremendous advance in political consciousness and in organisation was made by the working class in the years 1907 to 1913. But the movement stopped short at industrial unionism; it did not build a revolutionary party of the working class. Thus, in 1916, when the workers and working farmers began to secure some degree of war prosperity, and there was no immediate economic pressure forcing them into action, the revolutionary section of the workers failed to secure a mass following in the country as a whole.

In the years 1919 to 1921 the agricultural depression, following the fall in British demand for foodstuffs at the end of the war, and the rapid increase of unemployment in the towns, brought immense numbers into the struggle against Britain. But the leadership was in the hands of the bourgeois Sinn Fein Party, which was fighting for a greater measure of control in the exploitation of Irish resources. The settlement of 1921 established the dictatorship of the capitalist class in Ireland, in close alliance with British imperialist interests. The bourgeois nationalist leaders abandoned the struggle for independence, and settled down to operate the machinery of the Free State Government. After the settlement the special function of the Irish capitalist class became more clearly defined. The establishment of the Free State was not the setting up of an independent capitalist power; on the contrary, it has placed Irish capitalists, as the owners chiefly of means of transport and distribution, in the position of commission agents for British interests.

Ireland is inevitably involved in the conditions that are driving British capitalism to intensify the exploitation of workers and peasants in every part of the Empire, in order to maintain its profits. Both in Northern Ireland and the Free State there are signs of economic crisis. The volume of production as well as the population of the Free State has fallen since the pre-war period. In 1911 the population of the twenty-six counties of the Free State was 3,180,000; in 1926 it was 2,971,000. The volume of agricultural exports in 1926 was less than 87 per cent. of the average volume in the three years before the war. In Northern Ireland the shipbuilding industry has never recovered from the post-war depression, and the value of linen exports has declined from 13 million pounds in 1924 to 9 million pounds in 1929.

The general lowering of the actual standard of living of the agricultural population is revealed in the fact that while the cost of living at the end of 1929 was 79 per cent. above the level of 1914 (compared with 66 per cent. in Great Britain) prices of Free State agricultural products were only 39 per cent. above the pre-war average. Workers in nearly all industries have had to face wage reductions and increasing unemployment, in spite of the fact that from 1927 to 1929 emigration each year averaged 24,000. Of the working class and peasant families who remain in Ireland many are living to a very great extent on remittances from relatives in America.

In spite of falling production the Free State Government is increasing the aggregate capital on which interest and

dividends have to be paid. The Shannon Electric Power Scheme, on which the capital outlay up to 1930 was about 7 million pounds, and other development schemes, are financed by loans which have to be paid for out of Irish production. Capital imports in connection with these undertakings, as well as interest on profits previously accumulated in Ireland and invested abroad, are reflected in the heavy excess of imports over exports shown in the trade figures of the Free State:—

Year	Imports (million £)	Exports (million £)	Excess of Imports (million £)
1924	68.5	50.0	18.5
1925	62.8	43.2	19.6
1926	61.4	40.3	21.1
1927	60.8	44.1	16.7
1928	59.8	45.6	14.2
1929	61.3	46.8	14.5

The tariff policy of the Free State Government, which has imposed duties up to 33 per cent. on certain manufactures, has increased the cost of living but has not brought about any great development of Irish-owned industry. It has tended rather to stimulate the absorption of Irish by British concerns, shown, for example, in the buying up of paper works and flour mills by British companies.

This buying-out process has released a certain proportion of Irish capital for investment elsewhere, and new investment in farming is taking place. The Free State Government is taking active measures to rationalise agriculture and turn it into a profitable large-scale industry. Ownership of the big grazing ranches was transferred to large farmers under the Land Act of 1923, and hundreds of small farms have been sold up for non-payment of annuities. The number of separate holdings of less than 30 acres fell from 400,000 in 1911 to 292,000 in 1926, and to-day a quarter of the total number of occupiers hold threequarters of the agricultural land. The government's policy continues to squeeze out the small farmer. Centralised selling and credit agencies, including the co-operative creameries, and legislation controlling the grading of products and the standardisation of cattle, operate in the interests of the large farmer and lead to the consolidation of capitalist agriculture.

Ireland is not, and never has been, to any great extent a field for the investment of British industrial capital. According to McGilligan's statement at the Imperial Conference of 1930, Irish capital in British industry was estimated at ninety million pounds, and British capital in Irish industry at only

half that amount. The importance of Ireland for British Imperialism lies in its strategic position in the exploitation of agriculture, and in its food supplies, which become vital in time of war. Thus in four generations of nationalist struggle the Irish bourgeoisie won from the British ruling class certain concessions in regard to the land, which were essential for the development of capitalist agriculture, and (in 1922) tariff autonomy; but it did not win political or economic independence. British interests still exploit Irish peasants through the land annuities and through the exchange of the products of advanced industry for those of backward agriculture. Ireland is still a naval base under Imperialist control, and Ulster is still a stronghold of British interests.

At the time of the Fenian Rising Marx said that the Irish needed

- (1) Self-government and independence from England.
- (2) An agrarian revolution.
- (3) Protective tariffs against England

(Letter to Engels, November 30, 1867).

Which class interests to-day can carry through the struggle for independence and the completion of the agrarian revolution?

In the Free State as well as in Ulster the big capitalists are essentially interested in maintaining the British alliance. The government Party, Cumann na nGaedheal, openly upholds the Treaty and threatens a return to Dublin Castle dictatorship if any party pledged to repudiate the Treaty comes into power. Through the lowering of wages and lengthening of hours in State enterprises it has led the attack on the conditions of the working class, while by its support of the land annuities it continues the exploitation of working farmers in the interest of the bondholders.

Fianna Fail, the party to which, under De Valera's leadership, the majority of Sinn Fein went over in 1927 (at the time of the split on the question of entrance into the Dail), represents the smaller capitalist groups which are mainly independent of direct English connections. In the present economic depression this section is hard hit by the competition of large-scale British enterprise, and seeks to use the state machine to ease its own position. For this reason Fianna Fail proposes not to release the small farmers from the burden of the land annuities, but to collect the annuities for revenue purposes in Ireland. For the same reason it looks for assistance to American capital. In the course of the struggle to win land for the peasants and to expropriate the owning class, this section, like native capitalism in all subject countries, will ally itself with imperialism.

The Irish Labour Party has accepted the partition of Ireland and the Free State settlement, and is working to secure government office within the framework devised for the protection of imperialist interests. It has close connections with the British Imperialist Labour Government, and acts as the agent of the British T.U.C. and Labour Party. This was shown in the railway and 'bus strike of July, 1930, when, after a three months' strike of road transport workers for the same wages and conditions as railwaymen, a settlement was reached on the basis of increasing the membership on influence of the British N.U.R. Every important industrial conflict in Ireland has had its centre and its leadership among the transport workers, and the country's chief industry must inevitably be involved in the struggles of the immediate future. For this reason British trade union leaders are trying to extend their control over Irish transport workers and to win the best-paid grades among them away from association with militant organisations like the Workers' Union of Ireland.

The petty bourgeoisie in Ireland, as in every other country, is divided in its class allegiance. Economic pressure is continually forcing small owners, shopkeepers and farmers into the ranks of the proletariat; but their resistance to this process takes the form, not of organising a mass movement against capitalist exploitation, but of trying to secure for themselves the position of independent exploiters. The remnants of Sinn Féin, who, under the leadership of Mary MacSwiney, refuse to co-operate in the Dail; the groups which support the republican journal, "An Poblacht"; the left-wing nationalists, many of them members of the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army), who carry on the terrorist tradition of the old physical force parties; all of these, together with some of the intellectuals of the Gaelic revival movement, maintain the old anti-English nationalism, whose aim was to establish a separate bourgeois state in Ireland. Within these groups, and particularly within the I.R.A., there are workers and working farmers who have accepted a petty bourgeois leadership. In order to keep their support in the present economic position, which is leading to a sharp differentiation of class interests among the agricultural population, the republican leaders are being compelled to adopt a more definite standpoint on social and industrial questions. But the petty bourgeoisie, because of the uncertainty of its own position in the class struggle, cannot lead a mass movement. The fact that the republicans in Ireland have no clear political programme,



but concentrate on conspiratorial organisation and terrorist activities, reflects this fundamental uncertainty.

Thus, although the growing discontent of the petty bourgeoisie makes them potential supporters of real revolutionary struggle, it is clear that none of the bourgeois or petty bourgeois parties in Ireland to-day can lead the masses of the people forward to the completion of the agrarian revolution and the winning of national unity and independence. This leadership can only come from the revolutionary party of the working class, which, by its very nature, is in opposition to all those interests that are holding back the struggle; the class which is essentially anti-imperialist. Under this leadership all the forces which are fighting British Imperialism and its Irish allies will be drawn together, and the differences of race and religion, which have served to maintain the power of capitalism and to hamper the struggle for national independence, will give place to the division of class against class. Industrial workers and working farmers, who have fought in the long history of Irish struggles on behalf of the bourgeois class, will themselves seize power and set up a workers' and peasants' republic.

But victory cannot be secured without real mass organisation, both of the town workers and of the working farmers. The pressure of increasing exploitation unites the most militant of the organised workers with the unorganised and the unemployed, and brings them into closer association with the poor farmers, thus drawing together the ranks from which, under the leadership of a revolutionary proletarian party, the new fighting forces will emerge.



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