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30p

# REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS OF THE PAST



**J. DE COURCY IRELAND**



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### REAMHRA

'Revolutionary Movements of the Past' is No. 4 in a series of pamphlets that are being published by the Educational Department of the Republican Movement.

This pamphlet was first delivered as a lecture by Dr. John De Courcy Ireland at a Republican Educational Conference in Cavan early in 1971. The form the conference took was first the lecture and then those attending were divided into groups of 5 to 6 persons to discuss the lecture among themselves and out of this group discussion formulate a number of questions for the lecturer.

The pamphlet is in two parts. The first part of 'Revolutionary Movements of the Past' is Dr. J. De Courcy Ireland's lecture proper. The second and longer section is the questions from the various groups following the lecture.

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## REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS

### OF THE PAST

If we accept that the answer to the problems of our time is a socialist society we have to start by discarding the prejudices and the outlook in which we were brought up. This is a very difficult thing, and it takes probably the greater part of a lifetime to do, but it is essential, particularly in this country where we face the myths of our own history. Our history is far too full of heroic failures, and I sometimes think that small injections of insurrectionism have put us in very serious danger of being immune against the development of a genuine mass revolutionary movement.

We cannot afford any more heroic failures. I hesitate to think what would be left if we had another. So let us try to look at the history of our country from the point of view of the mass of the people who have again and again been misled, sometimes deliberately betrayed by the leaders.

For a moment I would like to go back before the 19th century to remind us of the great struggle that took place at the end of the 16th century, and the appalling myths that have arisen out of that. You have only to look at various people that we get put into our school text-books as great heroes and admirable examples to follow, such as the unfortunate Hugh O'Donnell, to realise, if you are looking at history from the point of view of the mass of the people, that these men led, misguided and ultimately let down this nation, in the most catastrophic manner.

This is what makes Hugh O'Neill stand out as such an exceptional leader at that time. He fought his battle in a European context. He was prepared to compromise with necessity when necessity forced it on him. He was able to see what none of the others would or could see, that what Ireland needed at that time was a State with all the paraphernalia of a State, and to live in the sixteenth or even the seventeenth century and not 7, 8 or 9 centuries before, which all the rest of them wanted to.

Unfortunately, as we get our history shown us, all these people are shoved together as great heroes, all similar in the pantheon of Irish heroes, without any attempt to analyse where their differences were. While the late 16th century movement failed, Hugh O'Neill, I repeat, was fighting for something that was conceivable, and the others were fighting for something that was quite inconceivable at the time.

The Republican Movement as we know it had a good start. It had a start with that great movement of the United Irishmen which was formally in the context of the development of the world at the time. It was not isolated from the great trends of thought that were building up right across Europe, and have since built up from Europe into all parts of the world. This is, I think, one of the

basic things one has to look at, that this was a non-sectarian, democratic organisation that had as one of its' slogans "Let the Nations go abreast", all nations, including Great Britain, because Tone and his friends realised that they had a mass of friends in Great Britain, if they could be mobilised. They realised that the poor people of Britain were fighting the same enemies as themselves and this in itself was an extremely revolutionary step.

We all know that Tone was a tremendous admirer of the French Revolution. The French Revolution was two things. It was the start of the capitalist era for Europe in the way that we know it, control of society by the bourgeois class. It was that because it began as a great popular movement and the people were not able, for factors that we have no time to go into here, to control the movement and to keep it in their hands and to bring it to the final conclusion that they had expected when they started up a genuine political movement out of which they had expected a genuine democracy to grow.

For all that, as Tone recognised in those days when he was in France after the greatest days of the Revolution, much was positively achieved by the Revolution. When he was in France, for example, France had abolished slavery in its overseas dependencies, abolished the slave trade, and secured equality of religious treatment: it had abolished the rights of landlords – there are no such things as ground rents in France since the French Revolution. If you talk to a Frenchman about ground rents he does not realise what you mean till you bring him back to 1789.

Those things had been achieved and what is more, a great deal had been put on the agenda that has remained on the agenda of history, not only in Ireland but in every country in the world, ever since. Civil rights we have talked about in these last years with conviction, but these were the very rights that were put on the agenda of history by that tremendous movement in France, which Tone so admired.

The growth that followed in this country of movements trying to achieve something of what Tone had been advocating seems to me (this is what we have to discuss because these things have never been thoroughly analysed) to have moved with the passage of time further away from the economic basis of society into the clouds. Do not think for a moment that one is trying to deny the heroism of people who died or to deny their tremendous self-sacrifice, but the fact is that unless you base a movement on reality the movement is bound to fail, and with its failure it brings disaster for the people in whose name it is created, and this, as members of a movement working towards the good of humanity, is one of the things above all we have to remember.

I will not go in detail into the ideas and the organisation of the Young Irelanders. (There was not much organisation till a brief moment towards the end but it collapsed). I would say that there is an enormous difference if you make a study of them, between the ideas that Davis had, which were based on

pretty sound economic vision of what could be done with the economics of the country, and the ideas of James Stephens, a great organiser, one of the greatest political organisers we ever had, but who in his famous document of 1862 in which he put forward what he proposed for the Ireland that would eventually be liberated by the Fenian Movement, was far from explicit about the economic vision he had. In fact; if you read carefully what he had to say, it is full of contradictions because he was leaving a great deal of the class structure of society here untouched. He was going to tax the rich, yes, but he was not going to undermine the whole social system based then as now on exploitation of the poor by the rich.

To follow up the logic of what Davis had written would inevitably have led to the collapse of the structure of society as it was in the 1840's. The tendency since Davis, away from economics, is something that we have to look at carefully.

The Fenian Movement in the late 1850's and in the '60's was powerful here when in Europe generally there was a great upsurge of working class activity. There was a great upsurge of democratic movements, there was groping towards an understanding that the future of mankind depended on those things that had been more vaguely stated in the earlier really revolutionary stage of the French Revolution – that is to say, the dispossession of the classes who held the people in subjection through their control of the economic wealth of the various countries, and the need for cooperation between all the peoples that were thus liberated, the essential step towards the creation of a new world. Davis saw that very clearly.

Stephens had been in close contact with a number of revolutionary people on the Continent, a fact often kept from our knowledge because it is not supposed to be very good for us. He was in touch with the famous Blanqui, a French conspiratorial socialist who spent more of his life in jail than he did out. It did Stephens both good and bad (this is one of the things we could discuss) to be in touch with this particular trend in French politics at the time. He spent a good deal of his time, as you probably know, translating Dickens into French, and Dickens was a radical in England.

The questions that arise, when you look at what happened in the 1860s after this very widespread movement had been created are: Why did it fail? Why this movement that had been created by a magnificent organiser, and with a great deal of devoted following, why did it fail? This is one of the questions I think we have to go into with a great deal of care. What was the weakness of the actual organisation of that movement? Did it lie in the fact that it was not really a mass movement of the people, but that it was a conspiracy? Even though it was a very broad conspiracy, even though it was a very widespread conspiracy, and even though it had a fine newspaper for a time, ultimately the Fenian Movement's leadership believed, as Blanqui in France had believed, that you could seize power by a conspiracy, that you could organise a revolution on

a given day without considering what the development of the mass of the people was, what the mass of the people felt about things, how they were prepared to react.

The Fenian leaders' methods were very closely connected with their aims, and their aims certainly, if you read Stephens's document of 1862, were more than a bit utopian. We were to have a free country. Well that is terribly easy to say. But what did it mean? It meant really, and this is the essence of what we really have to talk about, a reproduction in Ireland of what Belgium was, or France was, what a lot of other countries were, perhaps a little more radical. After all when all is said and done if you look at other countries, France, Italy or as many countries as you like, is there one of them that had yet achieved the complete alteration in social relationships which has freed the human spirit, freed human beings to be real genuine human beings? This is a question every Republican and Democrat must ask himself. Cuba? Yugoslavia? Algeria? Albania? China? USSR?... All have taken giant strides forward, but has any yet achieved total freedom.

All sorts of incidents occurred in the 1860s which we have put into the category of our myths. We take them down every now and then and polish them up, and get a great thrill reading about the "Manchester Martyrs", and how the "Erim's Hope" crossed the sea; and yet they end up as pretty disastrous failures. Then we think about certain other connections the Fenians had with what was going on elsewhere. There were two really outstanding movements that occurred in the 1860s. One was the great movement for Italian unity. Now Italy was entitled to be united. If Italy was entitled to throw out all its old garbage into the sea and to create a nation, then Ireland was entitled to do the same, but if Ireland was entitled to do it surely France and Italy were entitled to do it.

If you have a look at the attitudes of a great many of the Fenians to the struggle for unity in Italy, you have to admit you get a shock to find the number of them who went to Italy to fight against Italian unity, though I am glad to say that I find the names of twelve Irishmen who were right through the campaign from Sicily up to when Italy was united (though still without its capital, Rome) on St. Patrick's Day 1861. They were with the outstanding revolutionary leader, Garibaldi. But there were a great many more, I am sorry to say, on the other side.

The other great movement of the 1860s was the one that came to a culmination in March 1871 in France, the first occasion in which people actually not only took power but kept it, God knows only for a few weeks, but for a few weeks keep it they did. This was a great movement called the "Commune of Paris", and it marks a decisive step in the history of humanity.

Take a look at what the Fenians thought about that. Realise one is not trying to criticise individuals, cut them down to a size (they were men of great personality), but when you think of what Kickham said about all that, and Kickham



was a leading Fenian, you realise that there was deeply engraved already in the movement in this country an inward looking tendency, a tendency to consider that we were holier than everybody else, a tendency to believe that somehow or another it would be possible for Ireland, sitting in the middle of the ocean, to achieve independence and a glorious future without relation to the context of the rest of the world.

To his enormous credit (though I think he made a great many mistakes in a great many other ways later on), O'Donovan Rossa took a different view about that, and when O'Donovan Rossa had been released and was in New York, he horrified a great many of the Fenians by going to the great meeting of protest against the condemnation to death of the leaders of the Paris Commune, many of whom, as he pointed out at the big meeting in New York, had protested repeatedly, and, as he pointed out, that at a time when the dignitaries of the constituency for which he stood for parliament when in jail, including the local bishop, had refused to allow telegrams to be sent in favour of his release.

The ambiguity that I think exists in the Fenian Movement is at the root of a great deal of what has happened since. You got for example an extraordinary amount of hard work done by Devoy, and if you read those papers collected by the late Desmond Ryan, called "Devoy's Postbag", you will realise that he was in touch with people all over the place, he was in touch with the Emperor of Ethiopia, the tsar of Russia's Admiral of Irish descent called Cronin, who was a chemist. He was also in touch with the Emir of Afghanistan and people anywhere who were going to have a bash at the British.

This was not done on the basis of an objectively considered struggle to create a world in which Ireland could genuinely throw off the shackles of landlordism (which was the chief oppressive force here then) and of finance and industry which already were beginning to have a hold on us, but it was in just this abstract sense of having a bang at the British. One or two people come out very well from all that, Dr. Carroll for example, who refused to permit the idea of the Fenians having a fleet of vessels to raid the British merchant navy based on Cuba. Why? Because Cuba then was to Spain what Ireland was to Britain – an oppressed colony. Occasionally you get an insight into what really the whole world struggle was all about in the 1870s and 1880s. But you never get the same illumination that you got from Wolfe Tone, that Ireland's struggle was part of a world movement towards the creation of a new and better world peopled by new and better men.

Then came the Land League. Now, the Land League split the Fenian Movement. Davitt is another person, who (like all of us) had sides that were extremely positive and then was quite as capable as any of us of going right off the rails. Davitt created the Land League with the help of the small farmers, and his greatness was in the first respect that he saw there was the germ of a real mass movement among the small farmers. There was really something going on, it was not a question of sitting in an office or in a backroom or in a field or

somewhere saying – “Well, we will have the revolution on such and such a date because that will be a good day to have it”. No, Davitt realised that the small farmers of Ireland had a genuine set of grievances, they were fed up to the teeth. They were prepared to act; and he gave them the organisation. Organisations are very dangerous things as I hope you all know. They tend to become very bureaucratic, they tend to become things that move away from and above the people for whom they were originally created.

In its early days, the Land League had a vast impact. It was fighting about an immediate economic question that was of vital importance to the Irish people: Who was going to own the land? And, after all, the land was, and still is, to a very large extent, the essence of our wealth. Yet Fenians such as O'Donovan Rossa felt that this was going off the rails, that this was moving away from the great goal of an independent flag for an independent country with an independent Republic, whatever that might mean, to something that was lesser.

In my opinion, having endeavoured to look at the Irish people's problems from the economic basis upwards, Davitt had the greater aim. But let us look at what happened then. There were certain successes won. What are these successes? We know about some of the successes of the Land League. They are a tremendous tribute to the mass action of Irish people. Irish people in mass action can create new forms of activity, they can create new forms of success, they can coin new words like 'boycott'. The whole land struggle had a colossal impact on Europe. You have only to read some of the French Socialists writing at the time and looking with envy on what the Irish people could do. But it wasn't any single organiser they thought of, they thought of the Irish people creating their organisation, 'The Land League'.

What should the Land League have tried to do with its success? This is where a great clash came, between Devoy and Davitt, if you put it in the form of names, but of course there were dozens of people on both sides. Davitt, and, let us face it, he was backed by two bishops, believed in nationalisation of the land, believed that the land of Ireland belonged to the nation of Ireland, and that this should be the aim of the Land League after it had crossed its first great rivers successfully and come out into the broad fields where it could have acted with enormous success. But the other faction believed in the small farmer getting his small farm for himself. This was a great dividing point, and of course Davitt was in a minority, and the movement went on fighting for aims smaller than those proposed by Davitt, aims that emphasised private rights for individuals before the social rights of the whole nation.

One of the next steps was the link-up with the Home Rule Movement. What was the aim of this? This was a move made when Davitt was at his most clear (Davitt called himself a socialist, whatever one may think of some of the things he did, such as his break with Parnell which I believe was disastrous). He felt that the next move was away from narrowness. The victory that had been won, such as it was, on the field of the land, now that you had the masses moving,

must be repeated on the broader political field. Hence his link-up with Parnell and the battle for Home Rule, and hence their whole struggle over the first Home Rule Bill, and the first Home Rule Bill was very different from the second, it was very different from the third, and one should, I think, study it carefully to see what was in it that made people who had been revolutionary in their actions feel that this was a step forward.

But you have not only got to look and see what was in it, and what made Parnell say 'there are no limits can be put to the onward march to a nation', but who was against it. Examine that, and you will find the whole history of the British Empire and its collapse. There was that sinister figure, Joseph Chamberlain, who represented in all its crystal clarity what British Imperialism meant. He said, if you give Ireland Home Rule the next thing is you will be giving Home Rule to A, B, C right across to India, and what happens to the British Empire, and what happens to the screws I make in Birmingham?

That in effect was what in 1886 Home Rule for Ireland was about. Those people who split with Gladstone, who hated Parnell, who actually brought him to his death, (Parnell of course had his limitations, we know that, but they hated him so much because by incarnating Home Rule he was dangerous), those people were the people who saw with the greatest clarity that the British Empire had to be ruled the way that Ireland was ruled, or eventually Ireland or some other subject people would give the lead to breakaway and create something totally new in the world in which the British Empire could have no part to play and would, with all other empires, have to disappear.

These are some of the questions that seem to me to arise out of what the Fenians did and said, what they were, what their personnel was. Because again you have to think, when, after the fall of Parnell, the next stage was reached in the 1890s, we have a pretty putrid second Home Rule Bill thrown at us, and there were a number of further land acts leading up to the great one of 1903.

Ireland was now moving into a new phase altogether, but many people didn't see it and the history books do not let you see it. It was moving into a new phase and the man who saw this clearest was James Connolly, then a young man. James Connolly saw that the land question was no longer the key question. The land question was no longer the key question for various reasons, one of which was that the price of land was going down because great power was no longer in the ownership of land but of finance capital.

The new imperialism was on its way, the genuine imperialism, the imperialism that meant the creation of vast international combines, the imperialism which lies at the root of giant fungoids like Esso, and Mr. Onassis's economic empire, and all their likes. James Connolly could not foresee all that, and Connolly, like the rest of us made his mistakes, but he did see the new tendencies with a clarity that was absolutely startling. When the country had been soaked with the ideas of the Fenians, been soaked with the ideas of the Land

League, had been soaked with Parnell, and after the Parnell split must have caused an enormous amount of disillusion, Connolly comes forward and talks in terms of the working class of Ireland, which in a sense was only just being born, because there were precious few factories, precious few big industrial organisations then. But Connolly had the vision to see that in the 20th century it was going to be industry that was going to dominate human life, and that the new century's key question would be: Who is going to own industry, the rich few, or the working people of the world?

Connolly saw it in the context of what was going on in the rest of the world, that Africa was being divided up by Germany, Britain, France and Italy, even Spain had a bit and Portugal claimed a lot more, and that they were prepared to do the same thing on China if they could, and that the United States was getting a hold of all that remained of the old Spanish Empire. Connolly saw all this and he saw that Ireland existed in the context of this new situation, and that the conspiratorial methods of activity that had been in action in the past, and activities purely on the land question, were now outdated, and what was needed was a vision of Ireland in the hands of the people, with, as leadership of the people, the new class which was coming to consciousness in Ireland, the working class.

Whatever in his actions he may have done later, Connolly never abandoned that as a basic principle, that the new class, the working class, must be the class that will lead Ireland.

Tone had seen that what he called that respectable section of the population 'the people of no property' would lead Ireland. But there was no working class in Tone's day in the sense that we know it now, and yet he had foreseen that this was the only way forward. After that, you don't get a repetition of this vision until Connolly, and I think that is the stage where we must close this lecture.

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## QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

When the Conference re-convened the Lecturer answered a question raised by the Chair during the Group Discussion.

A.

When the Chair raised the question of Russia and the role of the established Armed Forces in the revolution, or anywhere that he mentioned, France in particular, it was noteworthy that the situation had arisen where the ruling class, the ruling group could no longer rule as they had been ruling in the past, and that they were losing the support of their own armed forces to a very considerable extent.

This raises questions that I must say I think are very fundamental. Is everybody who wears a uniform automatically an enemy just because he wears the uniform? Do we not remember that the Bastille could never have been taken if the Garde Franchise had not mutinied, and shown the masses of Paris how to batter down those doors. The Winter Palace in Moscow would certainly never have fallen if the Aurora, the warship that was lying in the harbour there hadn't started to bombard the place – and that was the start of the 'Ten Days that Shook the World' and replaced the Tsarist decadent Empire with the vigorous Soviet State.

These are very fundamental questions. Similarly, I must mention Spain, because anyone as old as I am can never forget what went on in Spain in the 1930s. The people had elected a radical government, and they knew, I am sure, just as we would know if we elected such a set of people into the Dail, that they were not going to produce all the answers. On the other hand, they were satisfied they were going to produce certain reforms. They were immediately attacked. The greater part of the ordinary soldiers in the army and the greater part of the navy stood by the people, they had not been beforehand attacked consistently as enemies of the people, there had been an attitude on the part of those people who were revolutionary in Spain that these could be our friends when the day comes. The officers, of course, in their great majority, went with Franco, and that is only what you would expect, but he had to get troops from Italy, Germany and from Morocco before he could ever overthrow the Spanish Republic – let that never be forgotten; the ordinary soldiers and sailors stood by their elected radical government, and only foreign fascist troops and money killed it.

Q. Could it have been because Ireland was geographically an island that Irish attitudes to the Paris Commune and the Italian national revolution were so ambiguous?

A. When the Rising occurred in 1867 there was in fact an Italian socialist leader called La Farina who was in Dublin and was arrested and the police did not realise that he had come over here to take control of part of the military

forces of the Fenians for the Rising. One of the men who later led the Paris Commune was on his way but never got here. The section around Kickham and a good many of the Fenians who came from the United States had an absolute horror of any connection with the working class movement outside of Ireland.

The crystallisation of this division came over the following – the Manchester Martyrs affair, where no doubt to the horror of a good many good Fenians Karl Marx and a whole lot of socialists and all sorts of very unrespectable English people like Ernest Jones, the Chartist leader, backed the Manchester Martyrs, and fought very hard for them, and then over the questions of the Paris Commune and the Italian Movement for unity.

The Italian movement for unity was backed of course with great vigour by the socialists all over Europe, and Garibaldi himself was an active member of the First International. But the Fenians were horrified because it meant depriving Pope Pius IX of the control of the Papal States, and they looked on that as an attack on religion, which it was not in any sense. It was an attack on a State which was an obstacle to the creation of an Italian unified nation.

I think you will find the reason for all this in the division inside the Fenian Movement, which arose from the fact that they were what the Marxists call a 'petty bourgeois movement', which was hesitating and wavering first one way and then the other, who had greater belief in the respectability of what they were going to do in the end than they did in really trying to create a popular 'People's Republic'. This I do believe is extremely well stated in Stephen's 1862 programme, which was reasonable enough if you were prepared to accept a republican Ireland like the Republic was in France, but this was not what Wolfe Tone had wanted, or even Davis, the ideas and ideals of both of whom translated into objective fact must have led to social transformation.

Q. Had the Fenians any form of government planned for if they got power?

A. I don't think they did really, because otherwise I think Stephens would have given the call to rise in 1865. This was the key year when the American Civil War came to an end and there were supposed to be thousands of Irishmen coming from America with military training and so on. Only a few hundred actually came. Stephens again, you see, we have got this terrible habit of worshipping people in an abstract way and treating them as though they were in some way uncriticisable, and then if you do criticise them you have to damn them totally. Now Stephens had a great deal of quality about him. He was a marvellous organiser and he was a realist, and I think he saw that there was no hope, that even after penetrating the British Army which he had to some considerable extent done (but not the Navy which was in fact more important), the balance of forces was too strong against the Fenian Movement in 1865.

I think he was a realist, and this is a thing we could argue for a great length of time. How he said – no, we don't want to throw thousands of people to their death in a hopeless cause. Well, they changed their minds, he was thrown out

and two years later they tried; they failed dismally. At that stage of course they had not got any plan of organisation for what they would have done if they by some extraordinary miracle won. But in 1865 yes, these centres which were thoroughly well organised, the district centres, the local centres, the county centres and so forth would have been the centres of power, but as was said 'nobody knew about them'. That was the difficult thing, nobody knew the next centre, and the people would have been as brave as could be if they had known where to go to. But the whole lesson of the 1860s is that with the best conspiratorial organisation in the world you cannot create a revolutionary situation – that arises out of events, and in the 1860s did not exist here.

Q. Wasn't there actually a Rising in France organised by Blanqui, had it actually succeeded but then nobody knew it had happened.

A. No, it was not quite perhaps as effective as that, but the thing was that was perfectly true that Blanqui had a coup d'etat extremely well planned and it did disarm a whole lot of the police and the important people, but nobody knew about it. The first people of course that knew about it were the other policemen. So that did not work.

Q. What sort of reasons did Charles Kickham give for speaking against the Commune or the other Fenians for fighting against Garibaldi?

A. Though denounced uphill and down dale by Cardinal Cullen and Bishop Moriarty who said 'hell wasn't hot enough for men like that', you know they repeated exactly what those people said: Garibaldi represented anti-Christ and so did the Paris Commune. It was on this basis that the unfortunate people have so often been divided before that we were divided then, that the Church was made to be what the battle was supposed to be all about.

Q. How did they put up with Pagan O'Leary among them if this was their attitude?

He was in England, well this was a point, they were divided. Again I think we have to realise that the Fenian Movement was not a monolithic movement, it was a very divided movement, this comes out in all those splits, and if you read about the way they hated each other. What they said about each other and what they accused each other of doing, and don't forget this is something we are expert at in Ireland. You will find the essence of it if you read "Devoy's Postbag", how they hated each other, accused each other of running off with money. Poor Holland, he was one of the greatest geniuses in a mechanical sense this country ever produced, John Philip Holland, one of the great pioneers of the submarine. They created the submarines in order that the Fenians could sink the British Navy. But they ran off with the bloody submarine, different sections of the Fenians, and in the end Holland gave up, of course, and went and sold the thing to the United States Navy, created a company, was 'bilked by the people he was working with, and ended up a poor man. That was a very sad story. But they were divided right the way through, so that as Pagan O'Leary worked largely in England and the atmosphere there was not so difficult, he

was hated by the likes of Kickham. Kickham and co. had, I would say, and certainly Wolfe Tone would have said, exaggerated respect for what the Church was saying about itself, not for what the Church necessarily is but what the Church was saying about itself at that given moment. God only knows if they had lived to see Paul VI abolish the Papal army they would have realised Garibaldi was right and Cardinal Cullen was wrong. Paul VI did it the other day.

Q. You were saying when you were summing up, that Connolly was the first of the Irish revolutionaries that realised the real leadership in Ireland lay among the working class people, this new class that was emerging. At the time of the Fenians was the leadership dominated by middle class people and if it was was this not a reason for disunity with the mass of the people?

A. I don't necessarily say that all Fenian leaders were middle class people but there is a great difference between having a middle class outlook and being necessarily a middle class person. In fact, God only knows, we know too well that a lot of people who are not middle class have great aspirations to be middle class, and I think this was one of the things that was wrong with a great many of the people in the Fenian Movement. Again, we are not blaming them. They were the product of their time, of the system that existed, of the fact that in Ireland there was so little industry, so little concentration of people in great masses working together. They were isolated, small farmers, small shopkeepers, small business people, small professional people, and as such they were tinged with the outlook that such people tend to have unless they have been through the mill, or unless they by some way or another they happen to see the way things should be. Some of them were working class, some of them were small farmers, in fact.

Comment by Chair: The missing force that you need is a sense of identity with other people in the form of a common interest group to work together for a common objective, and the individual farmer rarely has this. If you have a large number of workers in the one place they automatically develop the sense of community. That is what makes the difference.

A.cont. That is how Davitt had his flashes of vision that he did get, he had worked in a factory in England and lost an arm in a factory as a very young boy. And unquestionably there were moments when Davitt really saw, but there were other moments when he was also affected by his own origin as a farmer's son and his connections with the Fenian Movement as such.

Q. As a comment on the Manchester Martyrs, what other contact did Karl Marx have with the Irish political scene at this time, what comment did he make on it and did his teachings have any effect on the political thought in Ireland or was it only in Connolly's day these things began to be understood?

A. I would say he did not have much effect in Ireland, but undoubtedly in early chapters of his famous "Das Kapital", some of the best analysis of some



sections of Irish history are still to be found, remarkably objective and very well informed; and his famous associate, Frederick Engels, whose money really financed him and kept him alive, as he was very poor, was intensely interested in Ireland and wrote a sketch of a history of Ireland, and married one after another two Fenian sisters.

Comment by Chair: The role of Marx in the campaign for the release of the Fenians in the 1870s developed into a mass movement with the English working class movement in London. This was very important indeed.

A.cont. This was very important because it did show that there was this common interest between the mass of trade unionists in London and the revolutionary movement in Ireland. Because they both had the same enemies.

Q. History books report that there was a massive number of Fenians in the British Army. It slightly mentions here the Church's role in the Fenian movement in that period. Feeling the sense of power that they still had if one goes back to that period one would imagine that its control must have been almost damn powerful, the Church's at rural level, and the damage it could have done to the Fenian movement. It was in part this that gave rise to the split and divisions in the Fenian Movement over Garibaldi?

A. Unquestionably, it is a great tribute to the people who joined the Fenian Movement that they stood up to the endless damnations. They got them to join on this understanding that "the day" would come, and when the day came there they would be. This was more conspiratorial than political work, and of course one of the greatest achievements that the Fenians did purely as an achievement was getting those soldiers out of Fremantle in 1876 who had been imprisoned and were going to stay the rest of their lives in Fremantle: it was brilliantly conceived and executed, a gesture of humane solidarity with comrades who could easily have been forgotten. But it in no way advanced the chance of revolution here.

Q. Wasn't part of the problem of the Fenians' if you like to use the term, liberation movement, that far too much reliance was placed on outside help rather than depending, as it boiled down to in the end, on their own strength.

A. This is a very important question. I think personally that Tone and the United Irishmen were absolutely right to feel that they had a right to rely on French help, because France then represented the most advanced section of humanity, and it represented the most advanced thought in the world and it was being struck at mightily by the British Empire of those days; the two, the Irish and the French Movements, had that absolutely in common. The French Movement was more powerful, and Tone rightly assessed that he had a right to call on the French to help. And things of course do not work out the way you hope them to do. Tone arrived in France rather after the crowning moments of the French revolution, but all the same he got a good reception and the amount of

troops who came to Bantry Bay in 1796 was quite enough to overthrow British rule in Ireland had they landed. There is no question about it, there were enough soldiers and enough disciplined force there to have overthrown British rule in Ireland, and unquestionably the Irish people would have joined them, and the whole history of Europe would have been different.

I think there is no question that the Bantry Bay failure was a great disaster, and I think Tone was right. I think every revolutionary movement has a right to expect help from every other revolutionary movement, and I think this has been one of our greatest weaknesses here, that our various insurrectionary movements have repudiated the thought of dirtying their hands with connection with others abroad. Now the question of Irish-Americans was a different matter because this was the beginning of this rather horrible thing that crept into the movement here, of what is virtually racialism, that you will work with Irishmen but you do not really want to work with anybody else, and what is an Irishman but a mixture of pre-Celts, Norwegians and a whole lot more besides.

This racial thing is a dangerous myth that we must absolutely be through with here. It was a weakness of the Fenians that, all right, they thought the Irish-Americans would help them, but they were not all prepared to accept an equal law for the French working class, the British working class and the rest, some were and some weren't but they weren't as a Movement. And again this retarded the movement forward of the whole of mankind which is what Tone so clearly saw that we ought to be part of, and must be part of if we are ever to move forward.

I don't see that in any stage in all of the movements we met we could ever have won without, or ever will win without massive support from the working class movement in Britain and other countries. I don't see how we can, because we are a small place and we are where we are, and I think this is one of the dangers of throwing in all our forces and killing off hundreds of young people for something that is going to be another failure — a premature conspiratorial insurrection before the masses of the people are ready and themselves working for change.

Our connection with the British working class movement, the French working class movement, the working class movement through Europe and now right across the world seems to me to be an essential part of our necessary strategy, and when conditions arise here, supposing they do before they arise in Britain or somewhere else and the revolutionary movement here is able to give a lead and power can be seized, or kept, or whatever the hell, it won't be seized or kept for long unless there is massive support elsewhere, and we have got to have that as part of our strategy. I feel utterly convinced because purely of quantitative questions. Take shipping: you know 90% of things coming in and out of this country are carried in foreign ships, so how would we exist for any reasonable time without the sympathetic support of foreign seamen?

Q. You don't think Ireland could be a Cuba?

We are a very different place from Cuba. I think we could do a Cuba if we had more external support, and were prepared to accept it, than Cuba got, — in certain conditions, not tomorrow probably, or even the next day, but it could happen. But we would have to be prepared like the Cubans, to accept a lot of external support and probably like the Cubans would have to be prepared to accept under conditions we might not always like. But without the support of the Soviet Union and to some extent China, would Cuba have lasted? It wouldn't, for all the heroism of Castro and the rest of them, the thing would have collapsed.

Comment by Chair: The main thing we could count on is if we were to make any significant step here towards establishing an independent republic we would have to depend on the English working class to rally to our support, and at least stop any British government from intervening, and this we should have to try and play for to some extent. We haven't started to develop this very much but we can do it.

Q. Connolly was a socialist and he had foreseen this heroic failure of 1916. So as a socialist and a professed marxist and as the organiser of labour in the country, why did he go out in 1916 knowing that this was going to be a failure, and never recovered after that?

Comment by Chair: I think he had enough confidence that even if he was a failure the movement generated might have a chance of succeeding, he would have to gamble on that. But if he had held back, you see, it would have meant that the working class movement had no place, and you would have had a reactionary right-wing rebellion that would have had no working class involved in it, and that would have been a bad thing.

A. I find this extraordinarily important and I must confess I have come to the conclusion we have never really fully analysed this as we should. Now the normal Marxist view is to quote what Lenin said about what Connolly did in 1916, and I think this is fairly dependable. On the other hand I have to confess that if you read what Connolly was writing in 1916 it is a bit alarming. Connolly was writing as though he had come that much under the influence of Pearse, he was able to talk about Germany, 7 years before the rise of the Nazi party, as though it was some kind of Utopia, and his praise of the German people and his contemptuous dismissal of Servians and other people who were fighting for their independence at the time and who had a record as good as ours, is frightening to read.

Now, again he was a human being, he was living under frightful stress. He was living in conditions when circumstances, I would say, were driving him to do things that in his inner insight he may very well have thought were going to be dangerous, after all, I don't know, to what extent was partition inevitable after 1916 took place? Did he think of that? I think he did, but was he prepared therefore to go in without the working class movement other than the Citizen

Army? Can we not say that what was missing in 1916, whether it was Connolly's fault or not it doesn't matter, what was missing was something more than just a group of working class soldiers. What was missing was a working class conscious political organisation. I feel in honesty to Connolly who was a genius, who was a tremendous person and to whom we owe the fact that we are here and are able to talk the way we do, that it is not fair to him (and were he here would dislike the thought) that we would feel it impossible to criticise him. Whether it is his fault, I have not had the chance to study it deeply enough, but whether it was his fault or whether it was objective circumstances which are so easily to blame for everything, or whatever the reason, the absence of the working class movement in 1916 caused 1916 to become in my opinion a heroic disaster.

Connolly did not wholly redeem that by his own participation and by the fact that he as a marxist took part in it. Now, it may have been inevitable, because the circumstances just made it impossible for him, but on the other hand it may not. I do not know, we have not looked into it, and I don't believe anybody has yet done enough study on that. He gave us the way, the key to see the future in many respects for Ireland, but I still believe there is a good deal enigmatic about his last year.

Q. There appears to have never been the coupling of the two kind of mass sections of the population, the urban working class and rural working class. How far wrong in fact was this in 1916?

A. Captain Monteith, I don't know whether he thought so at the time but he did once tell me that he had strongly advocated that there should not be the seizure of power in Dublin, but a mass guerrilla movement started in 1916. Whether he had the benefit of hind sight or whether he really believed it at the time, I don't know if there is any documentary proof one way or the other, but he seemed to me to be a truthful person on the whole.

Comment by Chair: The reason of the non-involvement of the rural people in the 1916 period I would attribute to the fact that the analogue with the Transport and General Workers' Union in the rural areas was, I suppose, the Co-operative Movement and it was under the leadership of Sir Horace Plunkett and the improving landlords and it was essentially a conservative thing and it had no real revolutionary aims at all. The mass movement of the small farmers was fundamentally economically conservative, and only wanted very moderate reforms, whereas the mass movement of the urban working class was fundamentally rather radical, and this is I think at the root of it.

Q. How important was the lack of mass media for communication and in relation to that how did the Fenians achieve regarding spreading their gospel?

A. They had a paper, "The Irish People" which was a pretty good paper while it lasted; it didn't last very long. Previously, they were confined to their own little groups, they did a lot of work in discussion inside these groups, as far

as any kind of records survive. Of course, they had the newspapers against them, and they had the pulpits against them, which were the main mass media they had, there was no television. There were some priests on the side of the Fenians, of course. In that sense they were handicapped, and of course every movement we have ever had has been handicapped, because it has had the mass of the mass media against them. This is one of the things we have to bear.

Q. When you were referring to the right of Tone to look for support from the French, would you agree that it is important to emphasise that the National Liberation Movement should not place its sole reliance, its sole hope of success on outside aid?

A. Not unless asked for. I think possibly there is a difference between what I would say and what a Trotskyist would say. The French, when asked, did respond in 1796-98. How different from the German government in 1916, who God knows responded with a minimum after enormous reluctance, and taught Casement what Connolly never learned, how bloody awful German imperialism really was. I think it really is like this, that when all is said and done when the Rising did take place in 1798 (and by the way I think that it was a great deal more successful than we are usually told), there was an extraordinary intelligent movement right down the midlands there, that took place without French help, and they hoped that they would hold on long enough to induce the French to come. Communications were very bad in those days and the French heard of it and then of course they did come, but it was too late.

All the same the fact remains that if Humbert with those thousand French men had even been only twelve hours ahead of where they were, the Movement was prepared to rise again in Longford, and that might have set the whole thing going again right up to Dublin. It was just a question that the British had too many forces and they had less distance to go. Humbert's march was a fantastic march and I think it could only have been achieved by men who were genuinely revolutionary, and who genuinely felt they were doing something in the nature of liberation of a country, as all the manifestos they had sent out proved and incidentally one of the regiments involved had been one of the old Irish brigade regiments, remains of whose Irish tradition which may have helped too.

I do feel that it is very hard today seeing that you are up against Esso and Onassis and all these things that we have got against us now, that really are colossal, they could buy and sell this country twenty times over. I was talking to a person who runs a salvage service in Italy and he had been working salvaging a big Esso tanker and he said that he came to the conclusion after it that Esso could buy the whole of Italy.

We have got to face that if we do win at some stage, if something comes along, and we are able to get power, we are not going to hold it, I don't believe, unless we get massive support from Britain and other people; because those people do not want us to have power, and they are not prepared to have another Cuba, and they are horrified about Chile which is a more dangerous proposition,

although of course it is not gone as far yet as Cuba. So our international rights are very important to us, and their international duties like ours are very important, and we have fallen down often on our international duties. I remember in 1939 writing an article about the Manchester Martyrs and mentioning Frank Ryan, and nearly getting shot by the organisation of those days for mentioning Frank Ryan, because he had left the organisation and the poor man was in jail in Spain and this was against the proper thing (the proper thing being a narrow inward-looking racialist nationalism that would have horrified Tone).

Q. Do you think there has been anybody in leadership in any revolutionary organisation since Tone, to equal him?

A. Connolly certainly was in his greatest moments, and Davis. Davis is being made into a sort of plaster saint, and everybody was being led to believe he was very respectable and so on, but he said some extremely penetrating things, particularly about small nations, all the small nations of Europe had a right to existence, they had no right to be swallowed up in a great bureaucratic new sort of imperialism. He used the words, I think I am right in saying – that bureaucracy was now taking the place of aristocracy, and this is just as dangerous. That may not be a very profound analysis, but he did see the kind of movement that was going on. We have no right to accept any of the leaders of the past as having the final answer, any more than we have the right to say that we have the final answer. The dangerous thing is that if you go on doing stupid enough things and you do them long enough you end up by decapitating not only yourselves but hundreds and hundreds of other people, and you have no right to do that in another “glorious failure”.

I think the greatness of Connolly, Tone and the rest of them is that you can analyse them and that they stand up to analysis and that they would themselves say, ‘yes, we were wrong on that,’ because they showed that they were objective enough to dismiss their own mistakes as stupid and wrong. This is why I think even a book which we always used to condemn, McDermott’s ‘Life of Wolfe Tone’ is very much worth reading, even if written from a reactionary point of view but still it is the best life of Tone that exists so far. In the end that you can’t help but see that however much McDermott tries to denigrate the man he was a really great man.

Q. Today in Ireland people say if we read Marx and if we as a Movement came out really strong in giving support to the Palestine guerrillas, to the South Vietnamese people in their struggle for liberation etc., we are automatically alienating ourselves from the Irish people?

A. You can only do that if you have persuaded enough people that you are honest. I mean this is I am sure Roy’s experience, if you have had a long period of struggle for certain rights for certain people, persuaded them that you were really fighting for them then you can say the most outrageous things, and they may not even agree with you, but will say, after all these people have done right about A, B, C, so maybe they are right too about Vietnam, etc.

It is not wise to separate the national from the social movement and to treat the situation as though we could solve the one and tackle the other. Because, whether I am right or wrong, I will merely throw it out as the vision I have of it, it would be impossible given the circumstances that we live in today, whatever it may have been in 1848 or 1867, to tackle the national question here without immediately coming up against the social question. The whole of this Haughey\* business surely proves this. The whole essence of a genuine attack on the national question has got to be an attack on the whole social set up here.

Whereas we have to work for our own liberation, our own transformation here naturally on our own, that is our business. It would be unwise in my opinion to believe that you could neglect the necessity of having foreign help. Of course movements have developed in places which we have to be part of, and which may be ahead of what goes on elsewhere, but generally speaking it is hard to visualise the success of a movement without being certain of very massive support elsewhere.

Then with regard to Cyprus, this is a very good lesson to us of the failure of a movement in circumstances not unlike our own, to achieve what we have not achieved yet, that is the break down of the sectarian barrier. Because the Turkish people in Cyprus, the Mohammedan people in Cyprus, unquestionably have not accepted the system that has been set up. They do not feel they belong to it, and I imagine we could learn an awful lot from finding out a great deal more about it than, for example, I know, and I know all too little about it.

Clearly, if the Turkish minority in Cyprus had been won to the Revolutionary Movement there, the situation would be totally different, Cyprus would be in a much more Cuban situation than it is, but there has been a total failure to do that. I do not believe there has been a Turk who has involved himself in the general national struggle. You cannot blame the Turks for this any more than you can blame Northern Protestants for being Orangemen. It is up to the Revolutionary Movements to find how to draw in these minorities.

Q. Could you elaborate on the 3 Home Rule Bills, what was the differences in them, and what, if anything, did they achieve?

A. The first Home Rule Bill, thanks to the mass movement here which developed around it and Parnell, who was an extraordinary brilliant Parliamentarian who, to the end of his days kept one foot out of Parliament too and believed in mass movements influencing Parliament and was therefore a very interesting character to study. Thanks to that the first Home Rule Bill was amended and amended until it became a Bill which he believed, and I imagine that if we had all been alive then with the views that we have now that we would also believe something could have been made of.

It has to be remembered that even with the Third Home Rule Bill Pearse thought something could have been made of that. But the first Home Rule Bill went further in the amount of power that it gave to the Parliament, and I do

not think Parnell had any illusions whatsoever when he said that 'no man can set bounds to the march of a nation', he wasn't just using words, but he meant that here is something we are going to use to get further. The second Home Rule Bill was a farce in that it set up the sort of situation that they have in the Six Counties today where there would have been an Irish Parliament but also Irish members in Westminster and nothing would have worked out right. The Third Home Rule Bill was something between the two.

Q. The isolated military actions of the Fenians, such as for example, the attempted invasion of Canada, may have some good points. Remembering that in America after their Civil War there was a number of good trained soldiers and the plan for the invasion of Canada and holding it to ransom and using it for a bargaining power for Ireland's freedom may have been not such a bad idea at all. People did feel that these individual acts of heroism should not be so casually dismissed. Would the speaker enlarge on this point please?

A. With regard to Canada, the mistake again that the Fenians made over Canada was this, in 1867 Canada was just setting up its new Constitution and there was as there is today a very embittered minority in Canada, the French Canadians and the Indians, and these were the people to whom an appeal should have been made, and it wasn't. Give the Fenians their due again and Devoy in particular, for all the odd things he did over other matters, Devoy realised the mistake and when the two great rebellions of the French Canadians and Indians occurred later, I think the dates were 1870 and 1886, a very remarkable revolutionary leader called Louis Riel led these two rebellions, Devoy helped them and the Fenians in America as far as possible helped them. The help I must say was rather small, and it wasn't extremely effective, but if they had been able to produce an invasion of Canada at that time it really would have a big effect.

Again I think the mistake they made was to evaluate the actual situation as it existed, and to think too much in terms of simply the good old Irish having a bash at the wicked British, and there was a situation that they could have exploited to their advantage very considerably. I am sorry to say that to read the actual invasions, there were three altogether, one of them was one of the greatest fiascos that ever occurred, worse than 1848, and the other two were not anything to be frightfully proud about. So that again we find the Movement that was not equal to its own pretensions.

Q. In 1796, Tone, while commenting on the success of the French Revolution and praising it lavishly, apparently did not appear to notice various weak points which had emerged in the post-revolution period, such as for example the abject poverty in France at the time. We were wondering does this mean that Tone's ideas were just theoretical, that you could call for the support of the 'men of no property' in the struggle, but could he foresee what the 'men of no property' did when they got into power. That



Q.cont.

is to say, was he just a destructive agent with no concrete ideas or what sort of society was to be foreseen if the revolution had succeeded?

A. With regards to Tone and France I think this is a question that cannot be dealt with in just a few words because it is a very complex subject. The revolution had passed its peak, but I think Tone recognised this, that whatever or however much power might have slipped into the hands of the new ruling class, a great deal had been achieved. On the poverty that existed in France – the collapse of the currency and all the rest of it were due not so much to the errors of the government, though there were errors by this government (the Jacobin government, the real revolutionary government had gone), but it was due to the fact that France was up against the whole of Europe, just as the Russians in 1920 and 1921. Whatever one might think of Stalin and the rest of it since, in 1920 and 1921, I believe any genuine revolutionary minded or liberal minded person must have had enormous sympathy for the Russians although they were immensely poor, because they had the whole of Europe against them, indeed the whole world.

So was the case in 1796 in France. I think Tone was perhaps a bit of a wishful thinker, I think that everything points to that. He was an extremely optimistic sanguine type of person and he arrived in France and he saw the symbols of victory, and this pleased him. He probably did not analyse it all as fully as he might have, but even if he had I think he would have come to the conclusion that whatever might have been the faults at this stage in 1796, there was still an enormous amount achieved, slavery had been abolished, landlordism had been abolished and all this and the basis was being laid for something new. He personally, prepared to make so many sacrifices himself, was in full sympathy with these people who were making sacrifices for a greater future, which unfortunately did not turn out to be all they had first expected.

Q. It was mentioned during the course of the lecture that the power of the Church had helped to wreck the Fenian Movement and we felt that this power of the Church has not lessened very much down through the years, and perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can take from the Fenian period is their struggle between themselves as a revolutionary movement, not between themselves and the powers of state, but between themselves and the powers of the Church for the support of the working people. We feel that by examining the way the Fenians dealt with the power of the Church, we would learn something from their struggle. For example, do we now oppose the Church openly or do we try and win their support or what did the Fenians do? We think that some valuable lessons for the present time would be learned from this period.

A. I was enormously impressed about ten years ago, when we had a very big meeting in Dublin on the question of Irish neutrality, when this E.E.C. thing was first raised. Lemass had raised it, and said we had no neutrality tradition, he had never read his Wolfe Tone, obviously. We had a mass meeting in Dublin, the "stand up and be counted meeting" in answer to General M. Costello. There

were two or three people from almost every rank from Private up to Commandant in the National Army there. They weren't there to spy what was going on, they were there because they felt that this was something and it meant something to them. So that is still the case, so is the case about the Church. I know and you may know that there are people in the Church today who are prepared to go a long way with us, and to treat the Church as though it is a massive whole monolithic enemy today is quite out of order in my opinion, because it is going through a profound transformation.

When I was in Italy the other day the people who spoke perhaps in the most passionately revolutionary terms were the members of the Catholic unions who had been very much influenced by this new group of priests in Italy just as they were in France. I know one or two of them here, who really believe in a social transformation and who believes that Christ was a Socialist just like the great Abbe Gregore, one of the great French revolutionaries said Christ would have been a Jacobin.

Let us not throw our allies away, we have allies within the Church, it doesn't matter what a person's religion is or what his beliefs are, we may disagree very strongly with them but if they are prepared to go along with us on the line of social and national transformation and liberation, for God's sake do not let us throw them away by treating them as automatically enemies, because they are not. God knows, weren't we speaking at a meeting with Sister Benvenuta and she said a whole lot of things which blew the old type history sky-high, there are a lot of those, thank God, in the Church.

Q. This group were discussing a number of points raised. One was the comparison then between the Paris Commune and the situation in Belfast and Derry in 1969; the I.R.B. conspiracy before the 1916 Rising; the Treaty. Is it necessary to have a military group as part of a revolutionary movement? What kind of activities led to the setting up of the Paris Commune? Was there street agitation etc., or was there popular unrest?

A. There is of course a difference between the Paris Commune and Belfast and Derry in that Paris even then was a huge city and the whole city fell into the hands of the movement, and there was no question of any sectarian division. The division was a straight class division there. Yet of course there were elements, as there have been in every big popular movement since 1871 when the Paris Commune took place, there were elements of popular control both in Derry and Belfast obviously.

The Paris Commune rose out of a very complex set of circumstances, the defeat of France by the new German Empire in the Franco-Prussian war, the betrayal by the French ruling-class of their own country, a thing that we know all about, they allowed the country to be defeated. Bad preparation, bad diplomacy, treachery on the field and ultimately treachery in diplomacy - allowed large sections of France to be torn away and the working class people in Paris who had undergone a very bitter siege and who were half starved

nevertheless were so disgusted at the fact that they were not allowed to fight although they were organised in national guard contingents but had not been allowed to sortie against the surrounding Germans.

When the humiliating peace was made this was the real spark that set them going but there were a thousand and one other things and this is what makes a revolution so much more than simply sitting down and saying, like the Fenians did, 'let us have a rebellion on the 17th March'. Things don't work out that way. There had been the teaching of this fellow Blanqui, the teachings of Marx, there had been the upsurge of trade-unionism in Paris for the first time because Paris was becoming a big industrial centre as it is now.

These had been the years of repressive dictatorial empire. All these and other factors as well accumulated to create a genuine revolutionary situation. It is interesting to note that Karl Marx thought that they shouldn't have seized power, he thought they shouldn't have because he was sure they would have been defeated; they were defeated. In the end he revised his opinion because he realised that though they were going to be defeated they had in fact for the first time created a socialist state; the example we realise, was such that it could never be lost.

This is what they did, and in this respect I would say that they probably went ahead of anybody that yet we can point to in this country, except perhaps the famous Limerick soviets in 1921, but because they did take everything into their hands in the most remarkable way, the more one can analyse it the more astonishing it was. They took over education, they chose a great painter called Courbet to put him in charge of education; they took over the factories; they took over transport; they took over absolutely everything, sanitation, health, everything, and they put it in the hands of the people.

Well, it is a question that of course always arises, to what extent were the people able to cope with these enormous burdens that suddenly were thrown upon them? There were all sorts of failings. It is from that that one can learn too. It was a remarkable movement, and the failings were such that one perhaps today can say, that in a situation like ours all sorts of electronic devices can help when the working class has support from dispossessed and discontented members of the intellectual class. Failure would be unlikely once the people seized power in a decisive area and assured themselves of external revolutionary support.

The conspiracies, yes. I think that this is precisely why we have our reason to condemn conspiracies, because I think that they lead to disasters. I think the conspiratorial nature of 1916 was a disaster. This comes back to what we were saying before, that had there been the participation of an organised working class movement in 1916 it would have been a totally different movement and it would not have left us with the myths and the ability to turn round and say that we are all united, whether we are Mr. Charles Haughey, or Mr. Blaney\*\*, or you and me, we are all supposed to be united behind 1916, and this is because of its

conspiratorial nature. This was historically determined, let us say, I think you have to say that and then analyse what you mean by it, and we have not time to do it now, but it turned into a disaster.

The Treaty. Well, I don't know whether the Treaty in the circumstances, perhaps again one would have to say — perhaps it was the only thing you could do, perhaps there would have been a total annihilation of everybody if you hadn't had the blasted thing. But don't let us pretend that that was a success, it left us with a partitioned country and all of the mess we have got to clear up now, and this is the result of these conspiratorial groups that will not put the matter before the people.

The militant group. There is no question about it that the ruling class will always, if they think there is the slightest chance, resort to force in order to hold what they have got. But there are ways of course in which this kind of thing can work out, and there should be people who know how to defend themselves and how to act tactically in circumstances of riot and circumstances of civil war and so on. I think no revolution could ever succeed without it. But to play it up to the point where those people who know this would become the leaders of the revolution seems to me to lead inevitably to the revolution ceasing to be a revolution and becoming a movement of some kind of military group. This is the difficulty that we are in and this is the difficulty we have got to resolve and this is therefore a key and basic matter, I would say.

It is enormously possible to expect masses of people, when they are genuinely moved, to do all sorts of things far ahead and in advance of what preconceived military groups may expect, and the history of every revolution shows that. They are not usually on the military front led by the people who, long beforehand, were working out the military tactics of it, but they throw up all sorts of people who understand the situation of the moment. They of course can be very much helped by the fact that they have a round of people for the various things that have to be done, for example, putting up barricades, take a ship across the sea (for God's sake don't let us forget this is an island) and a few other things like that. I think those are the main points.

Q. You seem not to accept the modern idea of a revolutionary being both a soldier as well as a political thinker and activist, you seem to think of militancy as merely physical force. Do you not accept, Palestine for example, are not just military technicians but also political theoreticians and political activists?

A. If I gave that impression, I should not have. What I was trying to emphasise was this, you don't get, history seems to show, a successful revolution simply by having a lot of politically activated people, who are militarily capable. Che Guevara in Bolivia is a very good example of that. The Revolution doesn't start because A, B or C military group, political group or any other one says "now we will have it", it arises, and you could never have a big enough military group if it turns into a bloody clash. It is all right to have as many

people as you like who know about what to do, but to expect that they lead and direct the thing seems to me to run in the face of what always has happened.

Trotsky obviously knew a lot about revolutionary military affairs, but he didn't know much about it in 1917, he learned it in the actual course of events. The various soldiers who were there at the very start didn't in fact take the leadership because the people who were able to gauge (because a revolution is such a complex thing) exactly what had to happen, took the lead. I think the same would be true of the French Revolution, the various military events of the French Revolution. Look at Hoche — he was certainly not a conspirator in any sense, neither was he a political leader, but he was a person who sensed the movement of the revolution, he was a person who sympathised from the first and became one of the great military leaders almost accidentally. He was an extraordinarily fine soldier and not a person who had previously said — now how do I give my military talent and knowledge to the revolutionary movement. These are the kind of people that every revolution throws up, the Spanish Civil War threw up a whole lot like that too, and the people who in fact were the sort of military core of the resistance to Franco turned out in the end, unfortunately, to be the very people who let the Movement down. The people like some of those great guerrilla leaders and so forth, Lister was one, they were the leaders who carried on to the end.

It is a very complicated problem and I think this is one we really will have to discuss at a future conference if we are to do it justice, and to learn from a study of it, all that is possible and necessary, to make the Irish Revolution. Thank you.

+ + + + +

\*C. Haughey, Dublin (former Minister for Finance) Page 19

\*\*N. Blaney, Donegal, (former Minister for Agriculture). Page 23

Both were dismissed, along with some other Ministers, on different occasions from the Government by Prime Minister J. Lynch. Each attempted to capture leadership of the ruling Fianna Fail Party and failed. The two men remained members of Fianna Fail and engaged, with other elements, in a power struggle within the party, using the situation in the Six-County area to gather support for themselves. With or without resignations of either man from the governing party, each will continue in their attempt to come to power on the sacrifices and sufferings of the Nationalist population in the Six County area and on the emotional Nationalism of the Irish people. Both are unprincipled opportunist politicians and are consistent only in their anti-working class and anti-national stand.

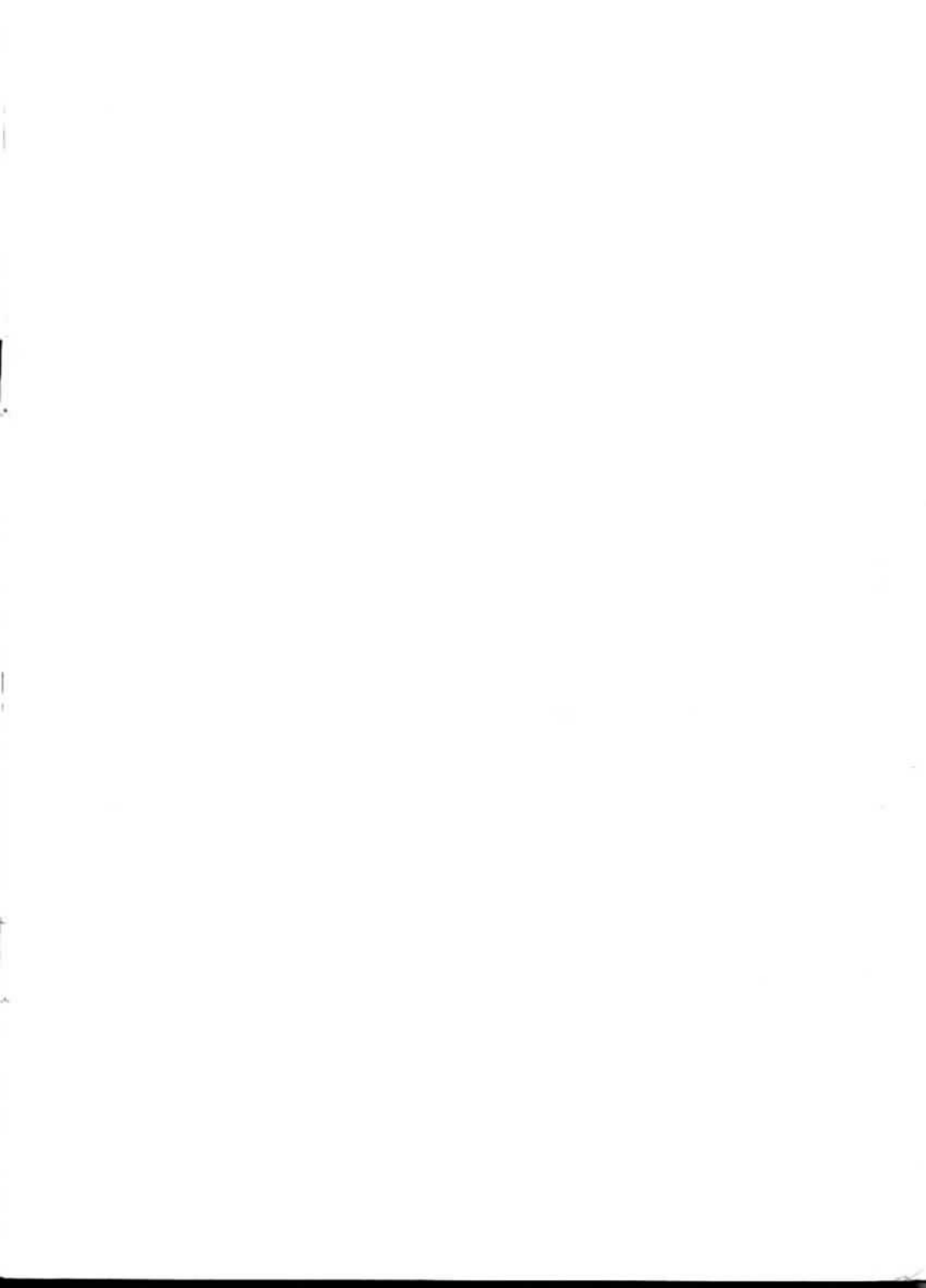
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