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THE IRISH REPUBLICAN CONGRESS



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THE IRISH REPUBLICAN CONGRESS

By
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EMBLEMS OF THE UNITED IRISHMEN

"He asked me 'did I think it was likely that the men of property, or any of them, wished for a revolution in Ireland?' I replied, 'Most certainly not,' and that he should reckon on all the opposition that class could give him."

—*Diary of Theobald Wolfe Tone.*

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Q. How shall we arrive at the blessings so certain from independence?

A. By a union of ALL the people.

Q. Do you mean the privileged orders in this union?

A. No. Were we to wait their concurrence, our delivery would be as distant as the general death of nature.

—*Catechism of the United Irishmen.*

FOREWORD TO SECOND EDITION

July 15th, 1935.

The first session of the Republican Congress held at Rathmines in the autumn of 1934 had to overcome some mistakes which were being made by a section of the delegates as to the stage of struggle in which the independence movement finds itself. There was a section which held the opinion that the Congress ought to differentiate its policy from those of the Fianna Fail and I. R. A. leaderships. That section wished to adopt the slogan of "The Workers' Republic" as opposed to "The Republic." It wished to form a new party instead of working for a united front movement.

The Congress decided that that was an incorrect approach to the present political situation. It held that the correct line of approach for Republicans, no matter what form of Republic they visualized as their ultimate objective, was a united front of Republican and Labor organizations for the breaking of the connection with the British Empire and the re-establishment of an independent Republic for a united Ireland. It realized that only that association of forces could raise the Republican struggle clear of the dwarfed formulae in which it was being stated and mobilize sufficient revolutionary power to sever the connection with the Empire. And it realized that only that association of forces could set the masses on the march for their emancipation by breaking them clear of the middle-class leaders who were blocking the road to the Republic.

The best proof of how correct the Congress decisions were is to be found in the process of clarification which has gone on within the different political bodies since that session.

It is becoming every day more apparent that the middle class leadership of Fianna Fail, in pursuance of its policy of protecting Capitalism in Ireland, is not attempting to sever the connection with the British Empire but is negotiating with a view to altering the form of association. And it is worthy of note that the principal advocates of the "Workers' Republic" slogan who broke with the Republican Congress on that issue have merged into the reformist Labor Party which, while claiming to be actuated by the ideals of James Connolly, supported the Free State against the Republic in 1922.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Rathmines meeting raised the Republican struggle on to a new high plane. It will be agreed that the demand for complete national independence does now, in the words of the Athlone Manifesto, dominate the whole political field.

The Congress declared the necessity for the workers and small farmers of Ireland winning to the leadership of the national struggle. And here again considerable success was effected. Through the team work made possible within the Congress the working class was able to take the lead in anti-fascist, anti-imperialist demonstrations. But we have not done all that we ought to have done. We talk of the working class coming into the leadership of the Republican movement without realizing that the way to do that is just to do it. Republican demonstrations organized around militant workers rousing all the Republican passion in an area have not been carried out as they should.

This must now be remedied. There is really no unsurmountable obstacle preventing us from getting up meetings where workers who are pivotal in Fianna Fail, I. R. A. and Trades Union bodies would be present and where the demand would be raised and enthusiastically backed to have British overlordship completely uprooted.

We need now the campaign for the Republic to rally the working-class factors within the Republican organizations behind their own militants. And this will only be done by doing it!

We have weaknesses to overcome in other parts of the Congress work, too. The Agricultural Resolution adopted by the Congress in Rathmines expressed the view that "The heaviest share of today's bad times falls on the agricultural community," and that "The heaviest share of the agricultural crisis falls on the agricultural wage earners and small farmers."

It demanded, amongst other things, "That ranch lands be distributed, without compensation to the ranchers, to landless and small farmer youth, with the State provision of the necessary credits, machinery and housing." . . . "That agricultural wage earners be guaranteed a wage which, in cash and perquisites, shall not be less than 40s. per week, out of work benefit; and adequate housing." . . . "That, as an immediate relief, all holdings under twenty-five acres be relieved of land annuities."

Here is sketched a view of a tremendously important section of Irish life; and behind these demands a tremendous campaign can be waged. This is work upon which the Congress has only made a beginning.

In the carrying out of the tasks visualized in the Congress Industrial Resolution there is also a vast field for effort. It was a long resolution. A few of its most important points dealt with: "Development of workers' councils in every town as fighting organs to co-ordinate and direct the struggles of the different Unions; these councils to include representatives of the unemployed." . . . "Struggle to organize the presently

unorganized workers; to minimize the falling away from Unions due to inter-Union disputes." . . . "To favor and agitate for the reorganization of the Trades Unions on the basis of one Union for each industry, to be formed, with the consent of the Unions concerned, by the amalgamation of members in several Unions catering for the industry; such Union to be organized on an All-Irish basis, with headquarters in Ireland, North or South." . . . "Wages for women workers in industry to be equal to that of men employed in similar capacities."

The need for effort on the lines of all of those clauses of the resolution has been demonstrated in the various strikes and lockouts that have taken place since its adoption by the Congress. The urgency of the last has been made especially apparent by the attack upon the status of women workers in the "Conditions of Employment Bill" sponsored by the Fianna Fail Government.

Unemployment is increasing both in Northern and Southern Ireland, but still the Unemployed are largely unorganized.

Included in the Unemployed Resolution of the Congress is the clause "That the Unemployed should be aided by all Congress supporters and Trades Unionists to develop a nationwide organization, and that they be given representation on the Workers' Councils in every town"; and a demand for "Abolition of all task work; all work done under relief schemes to be at Trades Union rates of pay and under Trades Union conditions." It cannot be claimed that in this work we have done more than make a good beginning.

The resistance to the Congress idea from the leaders of organizations—Fianna Fail, I. R. A., and Labor Party—is being weakened under the pressure of a rising appreciation of the need for team work—for united action. In this connection it would be impossible to overestimate the value of the Call from the different Republican organizations in America for unified action in Ireland for the re-establishment of the Republic.

"We believe that Ireland has reached the critical stage when the Republican enthusiasm of the people can be used to re-establish the Republic or may be dissipated in civil strife. In this serious situation we urge the Irish people to insist that representatives of all Republican thought in Ireland must meet in conference to find a means of reconciling their various differences, uniting on unswerving principle, presenting a solid front to the common enemy and re-establishing the independence of the country as a Republic." This appeal, issued jointly by the A. A. R. I. R., the Clan na Gael and I. R. A., and the Irish Republican Congress League of America, expresses so truly—both in its warning against the danger of

the present situation, and in its recognition of the one basis upon which unity can be achieved—the fears and hopes of the Irish people that the response to it must be immense.

Already it has been endorsed by several of the County Councils, and in the voting upon it it is noticeable that the only opposition has come from members — Cosgravite and Unionist — who are definitely opposed to the Republic.

Old I. R. A. associations in various parts of the country are also beginning to speak in support of the Call, and the fact that it has struck a deep note amongst the Republican population generally is proved by the many letters which have appeared in the press in support of it from people of various different Republican groupings as well as from people of no Republican affiliations. One of the most interesting was from Capt. Denis Ireland of Belfast, suggesting that the proposed conferences should include representatives of sections of the Protestant population of the North of Ireland who, while still unwilling to commit themselves to a campaign for the re-establishment of the Republic for all Ireland, are sufficiently interested in the proposal to wish to explore its possibilities.

Our exiles have done their part in creating a situation pregnant with wonderful possibilities for the development of an irresistible Republican movement. The next step remains with the leaders of Republican organizations at home. So far they have hesitated about assuming the responsibilities pertaining to a great forward movement such as the exiles have called for. Surely they will see that the time is ripe for it now!

FRANK RYAN,

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Hon. Secs.

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THE IRISH REPUBLICAN CONGRESS

By George Gilmore

THE Irish Republican Congress is the rallying centre for all anti-Imperialist sections of the Irish Nation for a united Republican drive against British power in Ireland.

This statement will evoke a deal of criticism and questioning. "Unity created by a split!" "Another new movement—what is wrong with the old ones?" and so on.

A lot of this criticism will come from old Republican fighters who "never let down the Republic," but who are content to rest upon the laurels won in former fights, and who rather resent this new stirring to life.

A lot more of it will come from sincere present-day Republican revolutionaries who are anxious to be into the struggle again, but who are, with very good reason, a little bit confused as to the issues involved.

It is for the latter that this pamphlet is written.

Unity

In the first place—Unity. What unity do we wish to achieve? Not an ideal unity of all the people of Ireland. That is impossible, for there are elements in Irish life that are hostile to Irish Independence. But a unity of anti-Imperialists—of REAL anti-Imperialists. And who ARE the real anti-Imperialists?

If we wish to attack an enemy with success, surely our first task is to make what the military text-books call "an appreciation of the situation." To study the enemy's position—to see where his strength lies—where his vital hold is and what auxiliary forces and influences he can use as supports. And then to make a similar study of the forces in the nation that are, by their nature, opposed to him. To rally them on the basis of their natural hostility to him, and to direct the attack so that it may not only shatter his defence forces but may destroy completely his grip on the country.

It will be admitted without question that there are within the Irish nation elements opposed to the overthrow of British Imperialism. It must be admitted that there are people who benefit by it. But it must also be admitted that the vast majority of the people of Ireland are oppressed by the burden of Imperialism and are capable of being mobilized for its overthrow.

The unity in action of these—the oppressed, and therefore naturally anti-Imperialist, people of Ireland—is the unity we seek.

A New Movement?

The Congress is not a new movement—except in the sense that before it was launched the Republican movement had come to a halt. It is better to consider it as the revivifying of an old movement—the movement for national independence.

As time moves on political forms change, but the struggle of the Irish people against the British conquest is still fundamentally the same struggle, and the Republicans of today are fighting the same fight that the clansmen fought who marched to Kinsale with the princes of Tir Eoghain and Tir Chonaill.

A Republic for a United Ireland

The objective of the Republican Congress is an independent Republic of a united Ireland. Since the days of Wolfe Tone this has been the accepted definition of Irish Freedom. Those political leaders who have attempted to make peace with England on any other terms have always in the end been repudiated by the Irish people.

The United Irishmen fought for this in 1798, and so did the Young Irelanders of 1848 and the Fenians of 1867. The leaders of the 1916 rising embodied this objective in their proclamation, and though some have since tried to persuade us that they would have accepted something short of National Independence, and others have tried to persuade us that their aim was something different from the unity of the nation according to Tone's definition of it, still I think we can most safely look for their objective in the proclamation that they signed.

But there is this in the Republican Congress that is new: It is the first attempt to base the National Independence movement upon recognition of the fact that Irish middle-class interests are not the interests that will lead to the Republic, and that, consequently, their political representatives must not be the ones to lead the national struggle.

This does not mean that no member of the Irish capitalist class has ever been, or can ever be, sincerely devoted to the cause of Irish independence. But it does mean that, owing to the connection that exists between Irish Capitalism and British Imperialism, he must, to be an effective force against the latter, become so separated in mentality from his environment as to be able to work whole-heartedly against the interests of the former. It is rarely that the mental separation is so complete as that.

This is no new theory. It was recognized by individuals in the Republican movement in other days, but it was never accepted as a theory governing the movement.

When, in 1798, the Northern manufacturers who were the leaders of the United Irish Societies, fearing that in arousing

a revolutionary spirit in the discontented peasantry and town workers they had set in motion forces which they would be unable to control, refused to take the field at the critical moment on the eve of the rising, McCracken said, in the bitterness of the betrayal, "The rich always betray the poor."

Pintan Lalor, in 1848, tried to impress this lesson upon the Young Irelanders. He urged them to make the fight for the land against the landlords the basis for the Republican struggle. But he was not heeded by the leaders of that day, and indeed there is evidence to show that the property-owning leaders deliberately prevented a rising because they feared that, if successful, it would drive out of the country not only British Imperialism but Landlordism as well.

Of the 1916 leaders, Connolly left no room for doubt as to his views on that matter—"We cannot conceive of a free Ireland with a subject working-class; we cannot conceive of a subject Ireland with a free working-class." But Connolly represented only one section of the leadership of that revolt, and after his death his teaching was never made the basis for Republican activities.

That the oppressed people of Ireland—the working-class and working farmers—are the people who have no interest in compromise with Imperialism, and who alone can be counted upon to free and unite the Republic of Ireland, is the basic idea of the Republican Congress movement—"We believe that a Republic of a united Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots Capitalism on its way."

The Congress Is Not a Political Party

The Congress is not a political party. To consider it as such would be to misunderstand both its organizational form and its functions. It is the organizing center for anti-Imperialist activities on the part of people irrespective of their party or organizational affiliations.

It is important to understand this, because it must be recognized that the only power adequate to the task of throwing off the burden of British Imperialism from Ireland is the unified power of the people who are oppressed by that burden.

As a result of the failure of the Republican movement of 1918-1923, and the stagnation of the years that followed, the Republican population of Ireland is for the most part unorganized. Those who are not completely unorganized are split up into a vast number of almost completely ineffective organizations and groups. But that population remains Republican, and though excusably suspicious of parties and programs, can be rallied upon definitely anti-Imperialist activities.

The Position Prior to the Congress

Prior to the inception of the Republican Congress, in

March, 1934, the position in Ireland was this:

The Republican Movement had been brought to a halt.

(A) **Northern Ireland:**—In Northern Ireland the Imperialist Government had established what amounted in effect to a fascist dictatorship. It had not abolished the form of parliamentary government, but had so armed itself with coercive legislation that its power was practically absolute.

By virtue of its "Special Powers Act" it can, and does, arbitrarily deport from its territory those who become obnoxious to it on account of Republican or working-class activities. These deportation orders are applied even to citizens who are resident natives of the Six-County area.

Under the same act it has assumed almost unlimited powers of imprisonment, without charge or trial, of its political opponents. Recently when Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of Fascism in England, visited Belfast with the object of extending his organization to Northern Ireland, Lord Craigavon assured him that it was unnecessary—that Northern Ireland had already, in its armed special constabulary, a Fascist force in being.

The unemployment question in Belfast was acute. In October, 1932, rioting so serious as to constitute almost a revolutionary situation had broken out. The Protestant and Catholic factions, by uniting their forces against the government, had succeeded in defeating an attempt to reduce the relief grants, and this victory had created a very favorable atmosphere for a united front Republican and working-class movement against Imperialism.

(B) **Southern Ireland: Cosgrave Party**—In Southern Ireland the pro-British Capitalist and Rancher interests (politically represented by the Cosgrave Party) were organizing a Fascist (Blueshirt) machine to hold that portion of the country for the British Empire.

The Blueshirts were campaigning against the payment by the farmers of annuities to the Fianna Fail Government. They were blocking roads, tearing up railway tracks and cutting telephone communications with the object of preventing the seizure of cattle in lieu of such payments. Their object was to win to the leadership of the working farmers of Ireland whose real interests are anti-rancher, and whose loyalties are Republican, but who were being so badly hit by the economic war that they were tempted to sympathize with such a campaign.

MacDonald's government in England was conducting an economic war against Southern Ireland, so that, in the ruin and discontent of the farming population it might make a basis for a Fascist dictatorship which would secure for England her grip upon the naval bases which she holds in the principal harbors of Ireland, and upon the food supply so

vitaly important to her in time of war.

(C) **Southern Ireland: Fianna Fail Party** — The Fianna Fail (Free State Government) party, which is the political expression of Irish Capitalism trying to strengthen its position behind tariff walls, was making half-hearted attempts to suppress both the militant Blueshirt movement for Fascism and the militant Republican defense against Fascism, and was trying to make a settlement with England by reforming the present Free State Constitution along the lines of "Document No. 2."

This party had gained the leadership of the majority of the Republican people of Ireland by representing itself as the "Republican Party." It could rightly claim that it was the party leading the National struggle, but that struggle had, under its leadership, ceased to be a struggle for the Independence and Unity of the Republic of Ireland.

The state of degeneration into which the National struggle had fallen was made clear when the conflict arose with the British Government on the question of Land Annuities. Here was one issue on which any Republican Government could be very sure of its ground, for the passion to destroy landlordism completely is one of the strongest passions of the Irish people. The British demand was the test of the oft-repeated declaration that the sovereignty of the nation extended to the soil. But instead of meeting the British demand with an assertion of a nation's sovereignty, and with a declaration that the imposition of landlord burdens would no longer be tolerated, the Fianna Fail Government dwarfed the whole Republican struggle down to the low ground of lawyers' arguments about acts of parliament and the issue of who should be Chairman of a Board of Arbitrators.

The role which Fianna Fail plays as the party of the smaller Irish Capitalist groupings attempting to strengthen their position behind tariff walls marks it as a partitionist party.

The tariff walls are erected as a protection against the competition of large-scale Capitalist Industrialism not only in England but also in the industrial areas of the North of Ireland.

The abolition of partition, with the consequent removal of the protective tariffs aimed against the Belfast area, would destroy the whole basis of this party's policy.

Perhaps the easiest way to recognize the meaning of Partition is to remember that Belfast Industrialism requires Free Trade with England, whereas the new Industrialism in the Free State is being developed upon a basis of Tariffs against England.

While recognizing that these Irish Capitalist groupings represented by the Fianna Fail Party are, to an extent, rivals

to the large-scale British and North of Ireland Industrial groupings, and are conducting a struggle against them for the purpose of obtaining greater freedom of action in exploiting for their own interests the workers and farmers of Ireland, still we must recognize that these groupings are not distinct entities. They are very much interwoven, and the Irish Capitalist groupings have so much in common with, and are ultimately so dependent upon, the Imperialist Capitalist Rancher elements, that their interests do not lie in complete separation, but only in a better arrangement of areas of exploitation.

This community of interests was made apparent during the Black-and-Tan war when the middle-class leadership of the Republican forces used those forces not to attack and uproot the pro-British landlord and Rancher interests, but to protect them against the popular uprising of the people who would have driven them out of the country and divided up the estates amongst the landless men and uneconomic holders—who would, in fact, have put all political compromise out of the question by carrying out a real reconquest of Ireland.

The following account of this stand against agrarian revolution is described in a pamphlet entitled "Constructive Work of Dail Eireann No. 1," which was issued by the Republican Ministry of 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 of 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."

A second pamphlet, 'Constructive Work of Dail Eireann

No. 2," describes how "terrified landowners flocked up to Dublin to beseech protection from the Dail," and proceeds to describe how they got it.

A Sinn Féin Court had given a decree against some small holders who had seized a ranch. The small holders had ignored the decree:—

"One night about a fortnight after the issue of the judgment, the Captain of the local company of 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!"

In this connection it must be remembered that it was not only the pro-Treaty section of the Dail Éireann Cabinet that found it possible to compromise with British Imperialism in 1921. One section, grouped around Cosgrave, accepted the "Treaty" which established the "Free State" of Southern Ireland, and became directly the servant of British Imperialism. The other section, grouped around De Valera, put forward as an alternative "Document No. 2" which, by removing more of the symbols of Imperialism, attempted to conceal the policy of entering into a working alliance with Imperialism.

De Valera was able to guarantee a united Cabinet upon "Document No. 2" if it had been agreed to by Cosgrave's section of the Cabinet.

Still, it is undoubtedly true that at the time of the launching of the Republican Congress the Fianna Fáil Party held the leadership of the masses of the Republican people of Ireland. This is true of those within the Six-County area as well as of those in the Twenty-six Counties, as was clearly demonstrated in the elections in the North in 1933.

The I.R.A. put forward candidates to contest the predominantly Catholic (and consequently vaguely nationalist) Constituencies of Central Belfast, South Armagh, Derry City and South Down.

Their nominee was elected in South Armagh. In Derry City and Central Belfast they received very substantial support simply as "Republicans" but in South Down the I.R.A. nominee was opposed at the last minute by Mr. De Valera and was overwhelmingly defeated.

The I.R.A. had, by the courage with which it faced the C.I.D. terror campaign and the 1931 Coercion Act, done a lot to unseat Cosgrave's Government, but it had, upon the advent of the De Valera Government to power, failed to formulate any policy which would enable it to win from

* The I.R.A. candidate in Derry City suppressed an edition of "An Phoblacht" because it contained a criticism of Fianna Fáil and, therefore, would have lost him votes.

Fianna Fail the leadership of the Republican people of Ireland. It had ceased to be regarded as an anti-Free State Government force, and was looked upon generally as a somewhat critical support for the De Valera Government.

In effect that is what it had become.

(D) **The Irish Republican Army**—Within the I.R.A. Executive this situation was outlined to make the case for an uprising of Republican opinion, expressed in a Republican Congress, to rally the disrupted Republican masses on the high ground of the Republic, and to restate the terms of the national struggle so as to lay down the basis for active participation in working-class and small-farmer struggles through which the allies of Imperialism in Ireland could be isolated and exposed. In arguing for the Congress the case was made that Irish Capitalism was prepared to make terms with Imperialism and would become the leading formation in the subjugation of the nation and the exploitation of the people. The thing to do, therefore, was to confront the forces of Capitalism and Imperialism with a Congress of the Ireland of the poor, so easily mobilizable if the I.R.A. organization and tradition could be brought to bear on the task.

Unfortunately the leaders of the Republican Army found themselves halted before the Fianna Fail position, unable and unwilling to attempt to get on a higher plane of struggle. The idea that it would be possible to urge Fianna Fail on to the Republic was not entirely absent. They failed to realize that the interests on which Fianna Fail rests had entrenched themselves across the road to the Republic. The need for gaining the leadership of the masses of the people was, therefore, very imperfectly understood, and it was possible for responsible members of the Army Council to make such statements as "The masses of the people always let down the Republic," and "I dare say we *could* get a big following—but *what would we do with it?*"

The workers and small farmers of Ireland followed the Fianna Fail leadership because they believed that it was working towards the Republic. It was necessary, therefore, to make it clear that Fianna Fail, as the political expression of Irish Capitalism organizing itself behind tariff walls, was not the party of interests moving towards the Republic, and the one way to make this clear would be to rally the forces of "the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for Irish freedom"—the workers and small farmers—and to pit them against the actual hold that England has upon Ireland—the Landlord-Rancher and Finance Capitalist interests—the people who are, to use their own phrase, "England's faithful garrison in Ireland." In this struggle for the reconquest of Ireland from the reality of British Imperialism it would soon become

apparent to which side the smaller Irish Capitalist groupings, which are the basis of the Fianna Fail Party, would gravitate.

In 1921 they turned the forces of the I.R.A. against the workers and small farmers in support of the Ranchers, and so created the situation in which they found it necessary to compromise with Imperialism, and in 1934 De Valera proclaimed that if it should become necessary in order to "preserve order" he would be willing to form a joint force with the Blueshirt Fascists.

To rescue these worker and small farmer forces from the leadership of Fianna Fail and to bring them into action was surely the task facing any organization claiming to be a Revolutionary Republican leadership.

During several years this task was urged upon the I.R.A. Army Council by some of its members, but without success. As a gesture towards the workers and small farmers it adopted and published as its objective a socialistic program "to be put into force when we achieve power" but it refused to bind itself definitely to that program, and, what was more important, it refused to associate the I.R.A. with worker and small farmer struggles, and urged the volunteers to remain passive in the face of the Fascist threat.

While admitting there was no military situation it adopted a "purely military" attitude and succeeded in isolating itself from the life of the people to such an extent that, upon the formation by the Fianna Fail Government of a new Free State Volunteer force, the I.R.A. has found it necessary to impress upon the minds of the people that the new force is not a Republican Volunteer force by the purely artificial expedient of assaulting its members and removing their uniforms.

The Athlone Manifesto

Here was a situation crying out for action—on the one side a determined attempt by the British and their supporters to clamp down upon Ireland the straight jacket of Fascist Dictatorship. On the other side an increasing spirit of Republicanism amongst the people generally, expressing itself in spontaneous popular uprisings and counter demonstrations at Blueshirt meetings, but looking in vain for a lead against the growing menace of Imperialist Fascism.

To meet this situation the call for the Congress was issued. It was based upon the recognition of the following facts:

(1) The grip of British Imperialism in Ireland rests in the Finance-Capitalist interests in the cities and industrial areas, and in the Landlord-Rancher interests in the rural areas.

(2) The failure of the Republican forces to attack those interests in the war years (1918 to 1923) led to the collapse of the Republican movement—to the abandonment by the Dail Eireann Cabinet of the Republic, and the substitution for it, by one section, grouped around Cosgrave, of the "Treaty," and by the other section, grouped around De Valera, of "Document No. 2." (It will be remembered that De Valera was able to guarantee a *united Cabinet* on "Document No. 2" if it had been agreed to by the Cosgrave section.)

(3) The Republican movement, to be successful in smashing the British grip on Ireland, must attack those interests and destroy their power.

To mobilize the forces that would make that attack was the task of the Republican Congress, and so the following Call was issued to all Republican and Working-class organizations and groups:

"We believe that a Republic of a united Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots Capitalism on its way. 'We cannot conceive of a free Ireland with a subject working-class; we cannot conceive of a subject Ireland with a free working class.' This teaching of Connolly represents the deepest instinct of the oppressed Irish nation.

"The fight for Freedom in our day has been weakened by the failure of the workers in the North-East to see that their freedom is inseparable from the national struggle for freedom. Now that deep wedges of workers there are freeing themselves from the illusions which so long held them in bondage to their imperial exploiters the national issue must be brought sharply forward.

"On the other hand, the Republican Movement in the Twenty-Six Counties must see that Irish Capitalism is the holdfast at this end for the imperial connection, and that the forces which defend Irish capitalism are the forces which in the final push for freedom will be called out to maintain the connection 'with an economy of British lives.'

"The lip-service paid to the Republic by leaderships that are tethered to Irish Capitalism can therefore only confuse sincere Republicans and withhold them from the struggle for freedom.

"Such organizations steadily dwarf the National demands. It was such an organization that reduced the Republic to the stature of Document No. 2 in 1921.

"It was a Government based on such an Organization which, when the British challenged the sovereignty of this nation on the Annuities, met the challenge not by raising the Republic and rallying the

people but by waving British Acts of Parliament and by a parade of lawyers.

"This retreat from the Republic was not, unfortunately, resisted by those Organizations which could have rallied the people on the high ground of the Republic. Had the I. R. A. leadership understood that the economic war was not being fought to free Ireland but to serve Irish capitalism they would have carried out this mobilization first before giving any support to that war. On account of their failure the Republican issue has been pushed farther into the back-ground.

"This mistake must now be remedied. A Congress of Republican opinion must be assembled to make the Republic a main issue dominating the whole political field and to outline what are the forms of activity that move to its support.

"Into this Congress will come Anti-Imperialists from N. E. Ulster representing sections of workers who have hitherto held aloof from, or have even been hostile to the National struggle. The areas of recruitment for Republican forces in the South of Ireland are:

(1) "Industrial workers who are being dragged into degrading working conditions to found a factory system at a time when the experiences of Europe and America are there to warn us of the horrors ahead:

(2) "In Gaeltacht areas which must be in close support of the Irish working class. The waste of confining this youth in among rocks to a dig with spades and to face the horrors of migratory conditions is becoming clear to an ever-widening area of Gaeltacht minds. The Gaeltacht youth must get help to tumble the walls and get free access to the broad ranches:

(3) "Small farmer and petty traders are strongly represented in Republican Organizations, and here is urgent work, for this section of the nation can only free itself as the ally of the working class. The Land Commission will never be abolished and the road open to the ranches except when a revolutionary government of workers and small farmers has achieved power. Only under such a government can agricultural wage earners of today be rescued from their sub-human conditions. Only under such a government can this present Civil Service be dismantled and re-built from its lower ranks at wages related to what general conditions in field and factory can afford.

"As the Republic when established will be a Republic of the workers and small farmers the forces that will achieve it must be drawn from these sections

of our life. In order that these forces may be drawn forward to their task, we, on their behalf, call for a Republican Congress, and pledge ourselves to take up the work necessary to build it."

The Congress Assembles

The Congress which assembled as a result of this call was composed of 186 delegates from various Republican groups, trade union organizations, Tenants' Leagues, Communist Party, Irish Citizen Army, Unemployed Workers' Movement, Working Farmer Committees, etc.

One of the most notable features was the presence of a strong representation from the Belfast Trades Unions.

Although the majority of the rank and file of the Irish Republican Army are favorable to the Congress activities, its Headquarters boycotted the Congress and imposed a ban upon its members attending it or aiding its activities.

The Congress adopted the two following resolutions defining (a) its policy, and (b) its organizational forms:

(A) Republican Resolution As Passed by Congress

(1) The Republican Congress is the rallying center for the mass movement expressing all the forces for complete national independence.

(2) The Republican Congress declares that the dominating political task is the realization of the Republic, and pledges itself to cooperate with and intensify the rising militancy, ready for a new and decisive campaign to achieve this end.

(3) The Republican Congress declares the social needs of the mass of the Irish people to be insoluble within any arrangement short of complete national independence. It sees in the struggle outlined for Congress forces on economic and social issues the basis on which growing strength of working class and small farmer masses will be rallied, and believes that the rising militancy which must accompany these struggles will find voice in strengthened and urgent demand that the Republic be re-declared. The fact that the Republic rises on the shoulders of these fights is a guarantee that the process of its building will expose and drive out the petty exploiters who would conceal themselves within Republican movements waiting for the time when they might use their power over Republicans to make terms for themselves and betray the national struggle.

(4) The main body of capitalist and financial interests in the country, based on the exploitation of the working class, is in alliance with the Imperial

State. These allies of British Imperialism sacrifice the interests of the nation to their own immediate interests. Instead of organizing against British Imperialism they organize for it.

(5) While it is true that certain sections of Irish capitalists develop opposition to the British Empire for the purpose of securing the exploitation of the Irish market in their own interest, it is equally true that this opposition can always find terms of settlement within the Empire; and the reality of the danger of Irish capitalism attempting to make its compromise with Imperial interests the basis of a national settlement was clearly shown by the general acquiescence in Document No. 2 by the Anti-Treaty sections of Dail Eireann.

(6) Therefore it is that the Republican Congress proclaims the only dependable forces for achieving the freedom of the nation to be the Irish working class and working farmers, and in their name the Congress repudiates the Treaty of 1921, together with the Government of Ireland Act, 1920—penal measures forced upon a Republican Ireland by military terror through the betrayal of the fight for freedom by middle-class politicians acting for Irish capitalism—and pledges itself to the decisive campaign for a free united Irish Republic.

(7) The Congress demands the withdrawal of all British troops, North and South, and the cessation of British subsidies to the Imperialist clique in the Six County area, subsidies paid out in an attempt to maintain division among the Irish masses.

(8) The Congress demands the scrapping of the Military Tribunal legislation in the South, and of the Special Powers Act in the North East.

(9) The Republican Congress will campaign to organize the widest possible backing for all working-class and small farmer struggles; it will work to achieve ever wider support for wage movements, unemployed demands, workers' housing struggles. It will back and initiate struggles of landless men for free land. The Congress raises the demand that all bank actions against working farmers must be withdrawn, and every attempt by banks to collect either interest or capital must be campaigned against with all possible energy; that working farmers must be freed from Land Annuities; that wages on all work under the Land Commission and Board of Works shall be not less than 40s. weekly. The Congress pledges itself to support agricultural wage earners in their fight for in-

creased wages, and social insurance and will help to organize an agricultural wage earners' union.

(10) The Republican Congress, rallying centre for mass struggle capable of smashing Imperialist and native exploiters, calls for a UNITED FRONT of working-class and small farmers so that the submerged nation may be roused to free itself and to free and unite the Irish Republic.

(B) Organizational Resolution as Passed by Congress

(1) This Congress is resolved that the forces represented at Congress shall be kept intact and expanded under the name of "The Republican Congress."

(2) That an intensified campaign for further Congress Branches shall be launched; and that the following outline of organization be adopted: (a) The unit of organization shall be a local Congress Branch. (b) The Branch shall organize a United Council of local worker, national, unemployed, small farmer and cultural formations to give effect to the policy defined by the Annual Congress. (c) National Congress, representing elected delegates from Congress Branches, from United Councils and from the formations out of which the United Councils are drawn shall meet annually and define policy. (d) The Inter-Congress policy shall be vested in a National Executive to be elected at the Annual Congress and consist of forty members. (e) The administration of defined policy shall be vested in an Administrative Bureau of seven to be elected by the National Executive. (f) The N. E. by majority at a meeting specially summoned for the purpose may remove the Administrative Bureau. (g) The N. E. shall meet every third month. Special meetings may be summoned on demand of ten members or by the Bureau. (h) Each branch and United Council shall become affiliated to the Bureau on payment of affiliation fee of 10/-. (Units of Unemployed may affiliate free.) (i) Each Branch shall remit 2/ per 20 members per month, to the Bureau. (j) Special Congresses on the same basis as the Annual Congress may be summoned by the National Executive or by the Congress Bureau.

What the Congress Has Achieved

It is not too much to say that the Republican Congress has stirred the moribund Republican movement into life. The Republic has again become the National demand. The popular

resentment against the Blueshirt Fascists has been mobilized and directed to such good purpose that there are signs that this movement has passed its peak point and is on the decline.

The anti-Imperialist counter-demonstration on Armistice Day, instead of being a mere matter of little Republican groups getting into fisticuffs with police and British Legionnaires, was such a huge mass demonstration that it completely overshadowed the Imperialist demonstration of the British Legion. A large section of the ex-Service men marched as an organized body with the Congress forces demanding "Freedom for this small nation."

It is, maybe, in relation to the partition of Ireland that the Congress has scored its most spectacular success. For the first time since 1798 a considerable section of the working class Protestant population of Belfast has identified itself with the Republican struggle.

On last Bodenstown Day three bus loads of men from the Shankhill Road district of Belfast travelled to Dublin. They laid wreaths upon the graves of the 1916 leaders in Arbor Hill Prison and then proceeded to Sallins and marched as part of the Republican Congress contingent to Wolfe Tone's grave at Bodenstown.

Some of the most prominent leaders of Belfast Trades Unionism attended the Republican Congress as delegates. These are signs of the times. It would be almost impossible to over-estimate the effect it will have upon the Republican movement when the workers of Belfast, instead of being the worst stumbling block in its way, become one of its chief driving forces—as they once were. The Clasped Hands of the United Irishmen can be the symbol of a political fact—but they have a necessary association with the Cap of Liberty.

All over Ireland the task of organizing the Congress movement is proceeding. A weekly newspaper, the "Republican Congress," is published to spread the doctrine of the United front against Imperialism. In the various areas those who share in this vision of Ireland on the march again are being grouped into branches. These branches will represent a great strength of Republican influence. Their task locally will be to undertake at this late hour what we should have been doing all through the Republican struggle—what Liam Mellows urged us to do in 1922—associating Republican forces with the day-to-day struggles against wage-cuts, hunger, Bankers, Ranchers and Fascists.

Set about this task with the same enthusiasm with which we built the movement that, from failure to take these struggles within its scope, inevitably betrayed the independence movement, and in twelve months the Republic will be not only the dominating issue—it will be the common people's lives.

Local Tasks

The local branches composed of individual supporters of the Congress movement (irrespective of whether or not they are members of other organizations) will have as one of their tasks the organizing of United Councils representative of local worker, national, unemployed, small farmer and cultural formations.

Through these Councils the Republican Congress will throw all its forces behind the strike committee of a big industrial dispute. Through these Councils the Congress will mobilize all its backing in one area to support local struggles and will use all its power to secure such extension of any dispute as will make an injury to one in very fact the concern of all.

In this way will be worked up a leadership which will lead the struggle for work, free land, guaranteed minimum wage, adequate unemployment benefits for rural as well as urban unemployed.

The Congress must grow in such a foundation as a tower of strength behind each local struggle and a nerve center for co-ordination of all these struggles, and for raising the workers' struggles from these economic and social issues up to the higher plane—the struggle for power.

It is in this vision of the Republican forces fighting for the liberty of the oppressed that we see enslaved Ireland rising. It is in this vision of the Republican forces fighting the battle of the oppressed that we see the Volunteer movement growing, attracting new recruits, learning new methods of struggle, clearing itself of concealed enemies of the workers' struggle—in a word, becoming the effective military formation of the oppressed people in Ireland, adequate to the task of the final struggle for power. We see no life for a volunteer movement that does not play this role in the Ireland of today.

Enemy Parliaments

Will parliamentary activities have any place in the Congress movement? That is a question that I know will intrigue some minds. It is not a simple question to answer. That the Congress formation should ever become a parliamentary political party is impossible unless it were to change its essential characteristics so much as to change its identity. It must be remembered that the Congress is not a party, but is a co-ordinating center for anti-Imperialist activities by people who may or may not be members of various parties and organizations. That it should ever regard the Free State Parliament or the Northern Parliament or a combination of the two as a legitimate governing authority of Ireland is impossible, and that it should ever believe that the election to those parliaments of a majority of people who were supporters of the Con-

gress would constitute the reconquest of power by the oppressed people of Ireland is impossible.

On the other hand, it has never adopted the "Sinn Fein" attitude that taking any part in elections for an enemy parliament is treason to the Republic, and that the mere negative attitude of abstention is a revolutionary one.

This attitude is itself an inverted parliamentary one and is non-revolutionary. It is a carry over from the days when there was a Republican Parliament in being, functioning so far as it was able, and claiming our allegiance in opposition to the British parliament. In those circumstances it was a correct tactic. In the present circumstances it is as meaningless as the English Jacobite proclamation issued at the coronation of King George V.

The revolutionary program of the Republican Congress will entail the organizing of the Republican people around Worker and Small Farmer councils, thus creating organs of struggle which will, in the logical sequence of events, be turned into organs of government once power has been achieved.

So foreign is the "Parliamentarian" or the "inverted-Parliamentarian" attitude of mind to the Congress that it has never, to my knowledge, formulated any policy with regard to Parliamentary elections.

From my knowledge of the Congress movement and of the people who compose it, I will venture to say that what will happen with regard to Parliamentary elections will probably be something like this:

If in the course of the various struggles that make up the Congress activities—the struggles of the landless men of the farming population for land, of the unemployed for work, of the town tenants for reductions of rack-rents, of industrial workers for better conditions of life—if in connection with any of these activities some person, who has become prominent in the fight, should be put forward as the candidate of whatever party or league or group is making that fight, then I believe that the Congress would urge its supporters to vote for that candidate in preference to any other.

In the last Local Government Elections it supported the candidature of representatives of worker and working farmer interests who went forward as advocates of the Congress plan of struggle.

If a Parliamentary election should take place in circumstances similar to the last two general elections, in which the issue did not directly concern the Congress activities, but was one between Cosgrave's Party and Fianna Fail, then I believe that the Congress would support the party whose return to power would be tactically most helpful to the Congress movement. Its attitude in such a case would be similar to that of the I. R. A. in the general elections of 1932 and 1933, except

for the very important difference that while urging support of one Free State party as opposed to another Free State party, the Congress would, at the same time, be carrying on its own campaign to win the leadership of the Republican people of Ireland away from both of those parties and to create a revolutionary Republican leadership to lead on past both of those parties to the seizure of power by the workers and farmers of Ireland and to the authoritative redeclaration of the Republic.

To quote from the columns of the "Republican Congress":

"The Organizing Bureau believes that as an ever-increasing depth of working-class and small farmer masses come into the fight for the Republic as visualized by Connolly that the treachery concealed behind varying brands of green phrases will now be startled into its proper association with the Fascists, and that the mass fight against Fascism at this stage of things has no secure halt for itself this side of the Workers' and Farmers' Republic. It believes, therefore, that the emphasis laid on the importance of parliament, which is used to create such distraction North and South, is unfortunate. The parliamentary struggle is only the echo of the thunder of the mass struggle against economic, social and National enslavement. As soon as really great mass backing is drawn to the Republican Congress parliament will be closed down by the solidified Fascist forces and the workers and their shock troops behind whom now will stand the majority of the masses will be refused a road forward by the naked bayonets of the Capitalist State. But the pull of blood-brotherhood, of class brotherhood, will tear gaps in that circle of bayonets and the vanguard of the workers will burst through.

The forms built for the Congress and perfected in carrying on the work after the Congress will still remain. The parish committees of workers and small farmers, the County Council committees of workers and small farmers will now become at once instruments of government as well as of struggle. The road into the ranches will now be open. Machinery, technical knowledge, seed, credits, all the power to produce food plentifully will now come into play.

The technical knowledge, machinery, buildings, materials, credits—all the national power to produce industrial products will also be mobilized and given its tasks.

The central council of the county and parish committees will work to co-ordinate production and to arrange the exchange, industrial and agricultural, while organizing defence against the uprooted exploiters and their outside backers. Men and women may have to stack their arms near their work—but where did they keep them during the times that beacon fires rallied the free clans?

Is this vision of a Congress to enthrone that great Ireland

that has borne its blows, bled, wavered, even broke, but always come back from the great graves to fill new graves just as great—is this vision of a Congress worth working for?"

The Irish In America

And what part can the Irish in America play in this developing struggle?

They can play a very big part. There has never been a revolutionary movement in Ireland in which the Irish exiles in America did not play an outstanding part.

As the urgent necessity in Ireland is that all genuinely anti-Imperialist sections of the nation should be mobilized and their efforts co-ordinated for the drive against the British power and for the redeclaration of the Republic, so in America the urgent necessity is that all the genuinely Irish-Republican forces should be mobilized to support that drive.

In America, as in Ireland, the Irish Republicans have become split up into many organizations and groups. These groupings have sometimes become separated upon organizational rather than political issues. In other cases they have real political differences, but in nearly every case they have so much in common that in support of an active campaign against British Imperialism in Ireland they can find a common platform.

There are, of course, Irish people, Republican in sentiment, who will not become supporters of the Republican Congress. There are people who will not accept its basic theory that the Capitalist and Rancher interests constitute the hold of British Imperialism on Ireland, and, as a consequence, that "a Republic of a United Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots Capitalism on its way."

Such people will regard the winning of the greatest possible amount of freedom of action for the Capitalist groupings in Ireland as "Irish Freedom." If they are logical they will fall into line with Flanna Fail in seeking a more favorable form of association with British Imperialism. If they are not so logical they will perhaps continue to talk about the "Living Republic"—to wonder why it was abandoned, and to hope for a miracle to restore it.

An Influence for Unity

The Irish in America can be a force for the unification of the Republican struggle in Ireland.

The I. R. A. Headquarters opposed the Congress at the beginning, and forbade its members taking any part in the Congress activities.

A majority of the elected delegates at the General Convention of March, 1934, voted in favor of the Congress. The

executive vote secured a majority against it. Different forces within the Executive opposed it for different reasons, but on the part of those most representative in their ideas of the I. R. A. rank and file it was a misjudgment of the political situation—a pessimistic underestimation of the Republicanism of the Irish people generally. It was argued that the I. R. A. would not be able to assemble such a Congress—that it had so little prestige in the eyes of the people that if it should attempt to initiate such a Congress all it would succeed in assembling would be a duplicate of an I. R. A. Convention.

Experience has shown that this was a mistake, and as the Congress movement develops that attitude of opposition is not likely to continue.

The activities of the Congress are activities that come naturally to the men of the I. R. A. They are activities that are necessary to the attainment of its objects. They are activities that will create in Ireland a revolutionary movement leading up to the seizure of power by the Republican forces, and as this becomes more clearly apparent through the development of the struggle, it is scarcely likely that any of those people whose Republicanism represents to them a task and not merely an attitude will hold aloof from it.

There are signs already that this is being recognized. The I. R. A. in Dublin have recently been allowed to participate in strike activities. In the Midlands they have promised their support to a campaign for a 50 per cent reduction of rents, and on the occasion of a mass meeting in Dublin in support of the Unemployed Movement an I. R. A. representative spoke from a united front platform with representatives from the Republican Congress, Irish Unemployed Workers' Movement, Communist Party and various trade unions. This tendency to become identified with the anti-imperialist struggle going on around it is an inevitable one for all that is revolutionary in the I. R. A., but it will be resisted bitterly by reactionary forces within it.

While it is true that co-operation in actual day-to-day struggles against the burdens of imperialism will be a powerful factor for unification of the anti-imperialist forces in Ireland, still it is also true that a long view sometimes shows things in a better perspective than a close one. There is not so much likelihood of a close-up view of one object hiding the rest of the landscape. In America there ought not to be the same danger of a close-up view of one organization obscuring the view of the Irish Nation.

In Ireland the Republican Congress aims at being an organizing center for anti-Imperialist activities carried out by people of all anti-Imperialist organizations and groups. So, in America, the support for the Congress must make its main drive for the achievement of a united front of all Irish Re-

publican supporters in America by building up a similar co-ordinating center representative of the different Irish organizations here.

That is no easy task, but it is one that can be accomplished. It is very decidedly a program of action, and there is little room in it for heroic posing.

The Congress movement in Ireland has given a bad wobble to some very pretty poses. But no matter—the Irish Nation is on the march again, and statues can't march. The long retreat has ended and faces are set again for victory. The most critical point in the rallying movement has been passed. The change of direction has been accompanied by a considerable share of shouting and confusion, but now the forces are fairly on the march again. The same forces that always supported the Empire in Ireland are rallying against us once more, and it is going to be a tough uphill fight—but what hurler cares for a "walk-over"?

Irish Republicans, both at home and in America, have survived many defeats and many disappointments and now there is work to be done again.

The nation is on the march again, but there are far too many people still on the sidewalks.

Step into the ranks!

ON TO THE REPUBLIC!

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