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**LABOUR**

**& THE REPUBLICAN**

**MOVEMENT** *George Gilmore*

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The matter contained in the pamphlet first appeared as a series of articles in "The United Irishman" and later was presented as a lecture under the auspices of the Dublin branch of Muintir Wolfe Tone. It was also presented as a lecture under the auspices of the Republican Society of Trinity College, Dublin.

Originally published in 1966 this study had a strong influence within the Republican Movement at that time and since. As Peadar O'Donnell said in his introduction to the first edition "I consider George Gilmore the best possible counsellor on the early, difficult first steps for republican leaders to release themselves from a rigid pose before history to enable them relate themselves to life. In this short study, *Labour and the Republican Movement*, Gilmore writes a footnote to Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*.





## LABOUR AND THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT

It is safe to assume, I feel sure, that young people who become interested in the Republican Movement are more concerned about the future than about the past. That is, of course, as it ought to be. It is that kind of concern that makes a movement. But you who have to make the future will naturally wish to deepen your understanding of the present by searching into some of the more obscure corners of the past that made it.

There is a good deal of our recent past that is deliberately obscured. The voices of the Establishment — and they are the voices that we usually hear — like to represent the war for independence that resulted in the Ireland that we know today as a victorious war. In this year of celebrations that fact scarcely needs to be stated. Then, if they approve of the state of society as it is, they try to consolidate it by representing the independence movement as having been merely an effort to achieve a recognised national identity. If they are critical of backward things in Irish life, and wish for a more progressive attitude towards the organisation of society, they express disappointment that the winning of 'independence' did not have the desired results.

My wish, in this talk, is to point out a few salient facts to help you to realise — not that independence did not bring the desired results — but that the forces in the country that were really striving for independence, and whose objectives could only have been achieved by the winning of independence, were overwhelmed by the forces of Empire both without and within Ireland.

If I pick upon two past leaders in particular, and use the clash of their ideas to make my argument, it is because they were — both of them — sincere and courageous men, who worked for the greater part of their lives towards their respective goals with about as little regard for their own personal well-being as any man can attain to, and, above all, because those two men — Arthur Griffith and James Connolly — have left behind them a body of writing, in books and periodicals, that leaves no room for doubt as to their objectives, and makes that clash of ideas a focus point in the history of the independence movement.

The 1916 Rising was the first Irish rebellion in which organised Labour, as such, played a leading role. It is questionable if the disillusionment amongst Nationalists with Redmond's Home Rule policy would have been sufficient to produce a revolt if Connolly's militant Trades Unionism had not been forcing

the pace. It is noteworthy that when representatives of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce were questioned by the Royal Commission investigating the causes of the rebellion they gave as their view that, despite their many protests and warnings, the government had permitted an insurrectionary situation to develop. 'Larkinism', they said, had been allowed to get out of hand, 'Larkinism,' at that time, was also 'Connollyism.'

That was, of course, a typically Chamber of Commerce viewpoint. There were other forces, too, working towards a bolder national policy than Redmond's — and that faces us immediately with the question of objectives.

We have become accustomed — increasingly so in recent years — to the suggestion that the objective of the 1916 Rising was a recognised national identity — "There goes a man who is different from other men. He is Irish." Was it? Uncle Tom had a recognised identity. He did not wear out his life in anxiety lest his master should forget that one of them was a black man. His concern was for freedom — to live his own life as a man. I hope to go some way towards showing that the objective of the 1916 Rising was, not national identity, but national independence — the reconquest of Ireland by its people. A free nation does not need to strain after an identity.

The 1916 leaders drew much of their inspiration from the original Irish Republicans — the United Irishman of 1798. In spite of differences of emphasis, at the very least, in some of them, none of them would have denied Tone and Emmet and McCracken as their political fathers. That United Irish movement had its origin here in Trinity College in the minds of men like Tone and Whitley Stokes and the Emmets, but the first United Irish Society was formed in Belfast, and it got its first mass support in Belfast and the neighbouring counties.

Those United Irishmen had based their independence movement squarely upon the social revolutionary ferment of their day. Their views on questions of national liberty and personal liberty were those of the progressive movements of the 18th Century and were worldwide in their scope. In the words of Connolly, they "advocated their principles as part of the creed of the democracy of the world." It is with some pride that we can remember that within their campaign for Republican liberty in Ireland they ran a campaign against slavery in other lands. They organised the distribution of anti-slavery leaflets to the crews of American ships that docked in Belfast, and they organised a boycott of sugar from the West Indies because it was produced by slave labour. They blocked an attempt by some members of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce to seek a share in the slave trade that was building the prosperity of Bristol and Liverpool. Mary Ann McCracken — sister of Henry Joy, and



herself deeply involved in the United Irish movement — was one of the early advocates of the emancipation of women.

It was, of course, on the affairs of their own country that they concentrated their major effort. They stated their objectives frankly and clearly in their original manifesto: “The Rights of Man in Ireland — the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers in this island, the inherent and indefeasible claims of every free nation to rest in this nation.” That manifesto, written probably by Dr. Drennan of Belfast, was the people’s answer to the hitherto unchallenged claim of the landed aristocracy to dominate their lives. It broke through the old traditional differences — racist and religious — that kept people still fighting the battle of the Boyne, and linked together two great traditions of struggle against oppression. To the one it meant the fulfillment of the frustrated hopes of the centuries-old struggle against confiscation and persecution that had marched them to line one bank of the Boyne. To the other it meant the fulfillment of the frustrated hopes of the rebel lads who had slammed the gates of Derry in the face of “The Lord’s Anointed” and lined the other bank. Where “The Divine Rights of Kings” made for division, the new doctrine of “The Rights of Man” urged unity of effort. It created a new concept of Irish nationhood that has struggled on through the years right down to our own day.

Not one of the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation would have repudiated the United Irishmen or their basic principle, but it was the Labour organiser, James Connolly, who most clearly understood their historic significance, and who, because he was a Labour organiser, was in a position to relate that political principle to the conditions of his own time. He saw Ireland ruled and dominated, not any longer by landlords depending on the British connection for support, but by moneylords depending on the British connection for support.

Disillusionment with Redmond’s Home Rule policy was growing considerably for years before the outbreak of the 1914 war, and when, on its outbreak his emergence as a recruiting campaigner for the British forces shocked large numbers of his traditionally rebel-minded followers into seeking a less imperially-minded leadership, there were three distinct such leaderships competing for the task of moulding those vaguely defined Irish loyalties into an effective force.

On the three, the one best placed strategically to gather to it the disillusioned followers of Redmond was the Irish Republican Brotherhood which was working by secret conspiratorial methods to win control of the Nationalist Volunteer force. It became the real, though unofficial, governing body of

the Irish Volunteers when they split away from Redmond's National Volunteers. It gained control in a disciplinary sense, but its conspiratorial methods could do little to clarify political thought, and so, while the I.R.B. was creating an army of courageous men dedicated to "Irish Freedom", it was an Irish freedom without definition, and it was only a question of which of two clearly defined political leaderships — Griffith's Sinn Fein or the Larkin—Connolly Labour movement — would dominate the coming struggle and decide its outcome.

Griffith's Sinn Fein Party had been in existence since 1905. Its objective, like Redmond's, was a Home Rule parliament for Ireland within the imperial system, but Griffith sought for wider powers than would have satisfied Redmond, and instead of agitation at Westminster he advocated a boycott of Westminster as a method of obtaining them. He placed especial emphasis upon freedom for Irish capitalists to develop industrially behind a wall of protective tariffs. He saw the Larkin—Connolly Labour movement, then rapidly developing as a leadership of the working classes, as the greatest danger to his plans, and was as hostile to them as William Martin Murphy's Federated Employers were. While the Murphyite press strove to connect 'Larkinism' in the public mind with 'Satanism', Griffith, appealing to a more vigorous nationalist spirit, dubbed it 'Diarmuid MacMurchadhism.' There was sufficient connection by dual membership between the Irish Volunteers and the Sinn Fein Party to link them together in the public eye, and they were often referred to, especially in the British press, as the "Sinn Fein Volunteers."

The Larkin—Connolly Labour movement also had clearly defined objectives. Connolly saw to that. He has left behind him so much political teaching in his papers, "*The Irish Worker*," "*The Workers' Republic*," etc., and in such books as "*The Reconquest of Ireland*" and "*Labour in Irish History*", that there is no excuse for ignorance on that score. The essence of his teaching is that the freedom of the Irish people (the nation) can only be achieved through a break with the British Empire (under any name), and that the only power capable of achieving and maintaining that freedom is a national movement led by the Irish working class. It involved the assumption of ownership of Ireland by its people — and effectual ownership at that.

It is easy to see the general pattern so long after the event. We need only glance through the newspapers and periodicals of the years before the Rising to see that, with all the vagueness and lack of definition that there was in the public mind, those two clearly defined concepts of Irish freedom were hardening into two rival leaderships — defining themselves by their hostility to each other, and setting the stage for the events that followed — for the Proclamation



of the Republic, and for its overthrow. The bitterness of that hostility in its early stages is not always realised. There has been a good deal of papering over the fissures, and we hear a lot of sentimental stuff from propagandists for the present State about different approaches leading to the same goal.

In "The Irish Worker" of May, 1911, Larkin, discussing definitions of "Freedom", described Griffith's party as: *"A party, or rump, which, while pretending to be Irish of the Irish, insults the nation by trying to foist on it, not only imported economics based on false principles, but which had the temerity to advocate the introduction of foreign capitalists into this sorely exploited country. Their chief appeal to the foreign capitalists was that they (the imported capitalists) would have freedom to employ cheap Irish labour! No, friend Arthur, the Irish capitalist has too much freedom to exploit the worker!"*

If the sharpness of that clash is not always realised, still less, I think, is it realised how close the I.R.B. leaders of the Irish Volunteers were, in their sympathies, to the Larkin-Connolly movement, and how sharply at variance they were with Griffith. It is commonly known that Pearse grew very close to Connolly in his political thought as their acquaintance developed. It would be difficult, after Pearse's last pamphlet, "The Sovereign People", with its enthusiastic approval of James Fintan Lalor's role in 1848, to doubt that he would have stood with Connolly in the inevitable reorganisation of society if their revolt had been successful. The lack of clarity of thought that is so apparent in much that he wrote has been a joy to his detractors. His glorification of the carnage in Europe in 1915, which O'Casey used so effectively to lampoon the Rising, drew from Connolly the retort, "Blithering idiot". His interpretation of the still passion-charged history of Irish involvement in the British civil wars of the 17th Century may even have caused some embarrassment to Connolly, whose interpretation had been so different, when he came to sign the Proclamation, but still, even though he made it easy for people to call him by that unpleasant term, "Separatist", he did leave on record his conviction that *"Separation from England would be valueless unless it put the people – the actual people, and not merely certain rich men – of Ireland in effectual ownership and possession of the soil of Ireland"*, and I know of nothing that he wrote that would allow me to place him with the supporters of the money-grubbing society that he so obviously despised. His sympathy with the working-class struggle did not begin in his association with Connolly. He had announced it publicly at least as early as 1911, when Connolly was still organising Trades Unions in Belfast.

In that year of strikes and lock-outs Griffith's paper, "Sinn Fein," was attacking the Labour movement very bitterly. Larkin was described editorially, not only as a ' Communist ' and an ' Anarchist ' but, for even greater variety, as ' An English agent. ' An article in a September issue – not an editorial – called upon the British armed forces to break a strike of railwaymen: "*We are forced,*" it ran, "*to pay for a very large force of police, and Dublin overflows with English soldiers. Yet, when a real emergency arises, the police and military together are not able to cope with so small a matter as ensuring the delivery of foodstuffs to their consignees in a great city threatened by starvation by irresponsible fomentors of sympathetic strikes.*"

The breaking of a strike by military intervention could be a pretty bloody business. A short time before that incitement was written a strike in Liverpool had been met by military action. A number of people had been shot and bayoneted, and an eleven year old boy had his head split open with the butt of a rifle. William Martin Murphy's paper, "The Irish Catholic", edited at that time by a man named Dennehy, prominent on the "Citizen's Reception Committee" to welcome King George V to Dublin, could not forbear to cheer, and to deprecate any more self-handed treatment of men on strike. "*Volleys fired over the heads of mobs,*" he wrote, "*has always been a useless performance.*"

That incitement to military intervention in the rail strike published in Griffith's paper was a bit too much for some members of Griffith's party. W.T. Cosgrave sent a letter to the next issue of Larkin's paper, "The Irish Worker," dissassociating himself from it in general terms. Eamonn Ceannt, afterwards a signatory of the 1916 Proclamation, sent a long, and very angry, letter to "Sinn Fein," and if anyone likes to compare that letter with the newspaper reports of Mr. De Valera's recent tribute to Eamonn Ceannt in Ballymoe, he will, I think, see how enthusiasm for national identity can be used to cover a retreat from national independence.

Mr. De Valera told us that if Eamonn Ceannt were alive today he would urge us to speak Irish. I think that the letter I am going to quote will suggest to us that if Ceannt were alive today he would have some other things to say besides that. "*Permit me,*" he wrote, "*as an individual Sinn Feiner, to diss-associate myself from the general tone of your recent pronouncements on the Wexford labour trouble, and most emphatically from the humbug written by some anonymous hero calling himself Boyesen of Kollund dealing with the railway strike. You appear to see Larkin at the bottom of all the trouble. You do not condescend to analyse any of the principles for which Larkin professes to stand. Sufficient for you is that Larkin is the agitator causing trouble between employer and employed. In similar manner the English Tory and his*



*Irish allies described Irish politicians as vile agitators who caused trouble between the good kind landlords and their willing slaves, the tenant farmers of Ireland. It is an open secret that Parnell, who was an aristocrat, had no desire to tack on a land agitation to his political programme, but Davitt and Kettle induced him to do so. Would it not be wise to take a leaf out of Parnell's book if you will not take it out of Larkin's book, as gravely suggested by Padraig Mac Piarais to the Gaelic League on Language Sunday?"*

Griffith hit back at Ceannt in his next issue. "Some of the strike orators", he wrote, "have tried to draw a parallel between the fight of the farmers for security of tenure and fair rents and the strike of industrial workers for higher wages. The fight of the Irish people for the land was the fight of a nation for the reconquest of a soil that had been theirs and had been confiscated. The landlord did not make the soil – but the industrialists made the industry."

The same issue carried an editorial: "In Dublin the wives of some of the men that Larkin has led out on strike are begging in the streets. The consequences of Larkinism are workless fathers, mourning mothers, hungry children, and broken homes. Not the 'Capitalists' but the policy of Larkin has raised the price of food until the poorest in Dublin are in a state of semi-famine – the curses of women are being poured on this man's head – Mr. Larkin's career of destruction is coming to a close, but when it has closed it will have established his name in the memory of Dublin as the man who did the maximum of injury to trade-unionism and the industrial revival."

That was in 1911. Not tactical differences, but realities deep-rooted in Irish life, were shaping things to come.

I have tried, by quoting extracts from Arthur Griffith's paper, "Sinn Fein"; and the Larkin-Connolly paper, "The Irish Worker," to indicate the forces that were gathering for the declaration of the Republic in 1916 and for its overthrow in 1922. "Irish freedom," to Griffith, meant freedom for Irish industrialists to manoeuvre to greater advantage within the imperial system. An independent Republic had no place in his plans. We fail to give him the credit for consistency that is his due when we think of him as a man who 'weakened' and signed the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty. On the issue of Partition he was tricked by Lloyd George, but, apart from that particular issue, the abandonment of the Republic and the acceptance of a place in the Empire represented very closely his own views on Irish and on world politics. He considered that, by the Act of Union, Ireland had been cheated out of her fair share of the fruits of Empire. He had written of Pitt as "No Imperialist", but "An English Absolutist" who, by destroying Grattan's Parliament

had destroyed the hope of the development of "An Anglo-Hibernian Empire" that would be "master of the world today." A sincerely patriotic man, he saw the development of industrialism within the imperial economy as the basis of all the goods that people mean when they speak of freedom, and he used the same words in his propaganda as other nationalist propagandists use, and so, among those who gathered round him in the Sinn Fein party there were some who were shocked to find that his unquestionable patriotism and his very volubly expressed hatred of all things English did not prevent him from calling upon the British military forces to come to the rescue of the Irish employers when their interests were threatened by the railway strike in Dublin.

The Larkin-Connolly Labour movement, as early as that, had a higher aim than merely improving the lot of the working class within the established order. In that year James Connolly and P.T. Daly were organising Trades Unions in Belfast. Larkin, in "The Irish Worker," referred to them as "*Building up an organised working class – the work we set ourselves to accomplish – the resurrection of the Irish nation.*" That objective did necessitate a break from the imperial system, and it was only when Connolly realised that Eoin MacNeill, a non-Republican Home Ruler, was not the real leader of the Irish Volunteers, and that the I.R.B. leadership that did control them was determined to make that break, that he joined forces with them. The sympathy of most of them, however openly declared, with the Labour movement would not have been enough .

I hope I have quoted enough of Connolly's and Larkin's own words to show that their aims were unattainable without the building of an Irish economy based upon the needs of the Irish people and upon their effective ownership of Ireland. I hope I have made it clear that Connolly realised that that could only be done by an independent Irish Republic.

As the 1914 war crisis developed he proceeded to act according to that belief – to claim for organised Labour a vanguard position in the struggle for national independence. Ever since the formation of the Irish Volunteer force he had been urging its members to press past the Home Rule Leadership and to take their stand for an independent Republic. In an open letter to the Irish National Volunteer Provisional Committee in 1914 he wrote: "*The triumvirate which guides the destinies of the 'other house' (Redmondites) has adopted as its official motto the words 'Defence not Defiance'; a very proper sentiment for any loyal son of Empire to express.*"

In November, 1914, Robert Monteith, then an Irish Volunteer organiser,



**was ordered out of Ireland by the British Government. The Citizen Army and the I.T. & G.W.U. held a meeting of protest. "He is not," Connolly wrote, "of our counsel, he is not of our Union, he is not of our Army, but as he was struck at by our enemy because he held the same high ideal of National Rights as we had, we sprang to offer our all for his aid. That was the true spirit of militant Irish Labour."**

Connolly was determined that the 1914 war should not pass without an attempt being made by the Irish nation to gain its independence. That is a fact with which we are all familiar. It is also a fact, though it is not so widely disseminated, that he saw that attempt, not only as an assertion by the Irish people of their ownership of Ireland, but also as part of the revolt of the oppressed people of the world against what he described as "a war of royal freebooters and cosmopolitan brigands."

In August 1914, at the outbreak of war, he wrote: "What ought to be the attitude of the working-class democracy of Ireland in face of the present crisis? In the first place we ought to clear our minds of all the political cant which tell us that we have either 'natural enemies' or 'natural allies' in any of the powers now warring". His advice was to see that the food necessary to feed the Irish people should not be taken away to feed the warring nations. Farmers would be tempted by high prices. Provision must be made for the Irish working class before food should be allowed to go. "Let us not shrink from the consequences," he wrote. "This may mean more than a transport strike, it may mean armed battling in the streets to keep in this country the food for our people. Whatever it may mean, it must not be shrunk from. It is the immediate feasible policy of the working-class democracy, the answer to all the weaklings who, in this crisis of our country's history, stand helplessly and bewildered crying for guidance, when they are not hastening to betray her. Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord".

The I.R.B. leaders of the Irish Volunteers were, of course, as determined as Connolly was that what seemed to them the opportunity presented by the war should not be allowed to pass without an armed uprising. As Connolly's determination became more certainly known to them they became anxious lest his plans should clash with their plans, and so they sought an understanding with him. It has been said that he was kidnapped and held until that understanding was reached. If that did happen it seems strange that it should have been thought necessary. What is certain is that Connolly was co-opted on to the military council and appointed to command the joint forces—Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army—in the Dublin area.

The story of the actual Rising does not need retelling by me, but there is one detail that is not usually stressed and that has especial significance in any examination of the role of the Labour movement in 1916. It concerns the manner of Connolly's death. He had been severely wounded in the fighting in and around the General Post Office, and, after the other leaders had been executed, there was a long delay. It seemed likely that his life might be spared. The news-paper that was virtually the mouthpiece of the Dublin Employers' Federation took fright and called in unmistakable terms for his death, pointing out to the British authorities how unjust it would be to leave that most dangerous man alive. So Connolly was taken from his bed, strapped to a chair, and carried before a firing squad. It was no lone voice that demanded his death. Within a week after the crushing of the Rising the Chamber of Commerce called a special meeting and passed this resolution: "The Council of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce hereby assure His Gracious Majesty of the loyalty of the commercial community to his person and his throne. They also do record their abhorrence of the dreadful scenes of murder, carnage and destruction resulting from the action of a section of the community in the city." Their souls revolted, you will note, from the murder, carnage and destruction in Dublin — while, in pursuance of a decision arrived at by a meeting of employers convened in November, 1915, by William Martin Murphy, they were sacking their employees to force them, through starvation, to enlist for the fun and games in Flanders.

In the awakening of national spirit that followed the Rising there was, inevitably, a considerable period of mixing around of different groups and organisations before the forces aiming in their different ways at Irish freedom were co-ordinated into an effective shape. Count Plunkett, who had been elected as a non-party Republican in a by-election in Roscommon, had, at an early stage, organised "Liberty Clubs." The Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army kept their military formations. Arthur Griffith's Sinn Fein Party still remained, and some volunteers, though not a big number, were members of it. The I.R.B. was extending its influence amongst the various groupings.

There was a great deal of confusion still as to the political objective Griffith's Sinn Fein Party had supported Count Plunkett's election campaign, but Griffith continued to oppose the reorganisation of the national forces on a Republican basis. There was argument as to whether Count Plunkett's victory represented a popular verdict for an independent Republic or for Arthur Griffith's policy of Home Rule under a dual monarchy. This part of the history of the times is dealt with in great detail by Dorothy Macardle in her book, "The Irish Republic". So far as my limited knowledge of the time goes, I think she is



accurate as to detail, although she would be the first to confess that she had little understanding of the social forces working below the surface.

When, eventually, a great convention of those different groups was held it appears to have been called together as a Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, but it became a mobilisation of all those advanced nationalist forces seeking an effective organisational form.

By that time the prisoners of the Rising had been released, and by their presence they strengthened the elements within that convention that were hostile to Griffith and favoured a republican stand. Many of the volunteers resented the term, 'Sinn Fein' that had been pinned on to them by the British pressmen, and wanted a complete break with Griffith who was still unwilling to campaign for an independent republic. De Valera, who had recently been elected in Clare on a programme which, though vaguely stated, was popularly understood to be republican, but who himself approved of Griffith's economic ideas, found a formula: *"Sinn Fein aims at securing the international recognition of Ireland as an independent republic. Having achieved that status, the Irish people may, by referendum, freely choose their own form of government"*

It would be hard to find fault with that formula for what is in it — unless we notice what is not in it. The form that a struggle takes is bound to have a determining effect on its outcome, and that formula gave no indication whatever of any kind of popular struggle that must necessarily lead to a break with the Empire. It left — as we may suppose it was meant to do — a door wide open for the return of Griffithism as a dominating influence, and Griffith seized his opportunity. He threw in his lot with the general voice of the convention and became Vice-President of the new Sinn Fein Party. After the declaration of independence by Dail Eireann in 1919 he became Minister for Home Affairs and for the greater part of the pre-truce portion of the war for independence he was Acting President of the Republic.

When Eoin MacNeill was proposed as a member of the executive body of the newly constituted Sinn Fein Party, he too was opposed by many of the volunteers who had not forgotten the countermanding order that had broken the back of the Rising, and again De Valera found a formula. MacNeill, he said, might have made an error in judgment, but *"I am convinced,"* he added, *"that John MacNeill did not act otherwise than as a good Irishman."* That, undoubtedly, was true, but good Irishmen, unfortunately, do not always have the same political objectives, and both Eoin MacNeill and Arthur Griffith took their places in the government of a republic in which they did not believe. They used the Republic as a stepping-stone to Home Rule in which they did believe.

Peadar O'Donnell in his book, "There will be another Day", has discussed this portion of our history with greater penetration than anything that I have seen. Describing the re-entry of Griffith into a position of leadership, he wrote: *"The country saw high drama in the incident at a Republican delegate meeting in the Mansion House when Father O'Flanagan, reporting on a backstage conference with Griffith, announced that 'Griffith has thrown in his lot with us.' The delegates got to their feet and cheered. But nobody noticed that Connolly's chair was left vacant; that the place Connolly purchased for the organised Labour movement in the leadership of the independence struggle was being denied; or reneged."*

It is easy to explain the failure of the new I.R.B. leaders to bring into the reorganised independence movement the pro-Connolly attitude of Pearse and Ceannt and Plunkett. Their attitude had been one of sympathy, not of agitational involvement, and sympathy leaves no heirs. It is not so easy to explain the failure of Connolly's successors in the Labour movement to claim a place in the newly formed leadership. It ought to be remembered, though, that the position of Connolly and the Citizen Army in Liberty Hall had not been altogether so unchallenged as we have since been encouraged to believe. It was pretty precarious at times. Anyway, whatever the reasons may have been, there was no revolt among Labour leaders when De Valera issued his edict: "Labour must wait."

I have tried to show how consistently hostile Griffith had been to the Larkin-Connolly Labour movement before the Rising. I have tried to show, too, that those I.R.B. leaders who, with Connolly, were responsible for the Proclamation of the Republic, leant towards Connolly's politics and not towards Griffith's. When Connolly was coopted on the military council and appointed to command the Republican forces in the Dublin area no one had suggested that 'in the interests of national unity' Connolly should stand aside and allow Griffith to lead. No one suggested then that "Labour must wait." But now, at the reorganisation, Griffith, who had been persuaded with difficulty to take his stand with the Republicans, was installed in a position of leadership while Labour was told to wait. Labour waited — and that was the great failure of our generation. I do not think it is too much to say that it was the determining factor in causing the collapse of the independence movement. This can be most easily seen in relation to the situation in the North. Like O'Connell's old slogan, *"Repeal of the Union — God Save the Queen!"*, Griffithism faced the hostility of Belfast Conservatism without offering any attraction to anything that was left of the old Radicalism of the Northern workers. It provided a welcome funk-hole for quite a lot of pseudo-radicalism. The Tories had played the Orange card, and the only card that might have beaten it was never played — not yet.



As a result of the general election of 1918 the Republic was established by popular vote. It was immediately attacked by the forces of the Crown, and the war that developed in its defence was fought in a political atmosphere dominated, not by Connolly's mind, but by Griffith's mind. Ernie O'Malley has described the attitude of the I.R.A. volunteers as being, generally speaking, vaguely sympathetic towards the cause of Labour, and that, I think, was about the size of it. Whatever gestures were made towards Labour by the Government of the Republic were kept well within the bounds of the social system that prevailed. The "Right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland" claimed by the 1916 Proclamation, and itself an echo from the Citizen Army constitution, was not made to mean the right of the people of Ireland to the possession of Ireland. Both in the slums of Dublin and in the countryside landlords were protected by Republican courts anxious to be 'fair to all sides'. In certain areas where landless men tried to move in on the ranches and demesne lands the I.R.A. was used to prevent them from doing so.

A pamphlet called "Constructive Work of Dail Eireann," issued in 1921 by Austin Stack, then Minister for Home Affairs, describes that development: *"While the I.R.A. were establishing their authority as a national police, a great 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... 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."*

Another similar pamphlet tells how 'terrified landowners flocked up to Dublin to beseech protection from the Dail,' and goes on to tell how they got it. A number of men had taken over some ranch land, and had defied the order of the court to vacate it. *"One night, about a fortnight after the issue of the judgment, the captain of the local company of the I.R.A. descended upon them with a squad of his men — sons of very poor farmers like themselves — arrested four of them, and brought them off to that very effective Republican prison — an unknown destination."*

Fintan Lalor, who had been so eulogised by Pearse, had been described by Griffith as a man who had tried to throw the agrarian struggle across the nation's road to freedom. With Griffith as Acting President of the Republic it is not to be wondered at that Fintan Lalor's teaching played no part in the conduct of that war.

It is not difficult to imagine what Fintan Lalor – or Connolly – would have had to say of a Ministry for Home Affairs that described such police work as ‘The Constructive Work of Dail Eireann,’ safeguarding ‘the foundations of the Republic.’ But Connolly’s chair was vacant.

The business interests that have dominated the Treaty State since its foundation did not only seize power after the defeat of 1922. They had been building their position within the Republican Movement ever since the general election of 1918 had made it obvious that Redmond’s Home Rule Party was finished as a protecting force. It was in the crisis of the Treaty that they showed their teeth.

The courage of the guerilla fighters, backed by the loyalty of the people, forced a truce and a parley, but they had built no new pattern of life around them that could make the people understand what was happening when their struggle to undo the conquest became, to their leaders, a wrangle over symbols of subjection – Treaty versus Document No. 2.

When the Treaty settlement came to be debated in Dail Eireann there were many speeches made against it that were admirable for their courage, and for their devotion to the ideal of Irish independence, but, so far as I know, there was only one that showed much understanding of the realities behind that settlement. Madame Markievicz, speaking as a disciple of James Connolly, pointed out that English Imperialism was working ‘by a change of names’. *“It is the capitalist interests in England and Ireland,”* she said, *“that are pushing this Treaty to block the march of the working people in England and Ireland”* That policy, with up-to-date streamlining, has since become familiar to the world under the name of ‘Neo-colonialism’.

Arthur Griffith’s part in the Treaty settlement was logical and consistent. He had always supported the capitalist interests – even to the extent, in 1911, of putting aside temporarily his ‘Irish Rebel’ attitude and calling upon the British forces to break a Larkin-Connolly strike. Now, in the sharper crisis of 1922, he again called upon the British forces, and this time, when the borrowed guns were roaring around the Four Courts, there was no protest from Mr. Cosgrave. There had been that much clarification of ideas on one side of the barricade. On the other side there had been no such clarification. The Larkin-Connolly leadership was gone. The I.R.B. beheaded of its pro-Connolly leadership, and, by reason of its conspiratorial methods unpredictable, threw its disciplinary influence behind Griffith and against the Republic. The Labour leaders, well-meaning obviously, but without vision – with their sights drastically lowered from Connolly’s objective – blundered into support for Griffith’s State, and a politically leaderless I.R.A. fought a rearguard action in defence

of the Republic until it could fight no longer.

That war, though it put an end to the independent Republic, was so hard fought that it forced Griffith's State to rely for support on the wealthy pro-British trading interests to an extent greater than Griffith had dreamed of, and greater than he would have liked, and so it fell to the Fianna Fail Party, when it came to power in that State, to try to put Griffith's theories of industrial development into practice.

The partition of the country, and the tendency of capitalist industry everywhere to consolidate into bigger and stronger cartels have militated against a successful working out of Griffith's theories, and the pressure of the Anglo-American power bloc — the leading political expression of that tendency — has forced the 26 Counties government to abandon its attempt to maintain an independent position in domestic or in foreign affairs, and to work back towards a closer integration with the British economy and with the political and military requirements of the Anglo-American alliance. A member of the 6 Counties parliament recently described this change of policy as — *"politically... the greatest thing in Ireland since the Act of Union. It emphasises the logic of the Unionist approach to Irish politics, and underlines our knowledge that these islands have a common interest in the world today. It creates a trading area such as we had in 1921."*

So we are back pretty much where we began. O'Neill is at last on talking terms with Lemass.

It is not my purpose to make any attempt to assess the merits of the various groups that are trying to find some way to resist this surrender, but only to suggest that, as the squeezing out of the Labour leadership from the vanguard of the independence movement was of such importance in ensuring its defeat, so it would appear that, if there is to be any future for the Irish people as a free people, it must depend upon a return by organised Labour to the politics of Connolly.

The power of the monied interests is the great pressure power on one side. It can only be met effectively by the power of organised — Labour,



● Cover photograph shows Cork dockers on strike 1920

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