

**Republican  
lecture  
series  
No.3**

# **Nationalism and socialism**

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# Nationalism and socialism

ALL THESE lectures are inter-linked and have as their collective purpose the creation of a greater consciousness and depth of understanding of what republicanism is and what it means to be a republican. This particular lecture will concern itself with the inter-relationship of nationalism and socialism in republican philosophy.

Sections of the ultra-left and certain pro-imperialist tendencies seek to suggest that nationalism and socialism do not mix except to produce fascism. Again, we are periodically informed by sections of the establishment or other pro-imperialist media that 'Sinn Fein has moved to the left' has 'embraced socialism'. This type of commentary often produces a deal of confusion and uncertainty within the Movement, particularly amongst younger members who may not have the awareness, knowledge or experience to answer it. It is hoped and intended that this lecture will include answers to such nonsense.

To achieve an understanding of the connection between nationalism, socialism and republicanism it is necessary to go back to basics. When asked 'What is a republican?' most people answer: "*Someone who believes in a republic.*" The difficulty with this answer is that the Free State claims to be a republic and the USA and France are republics. The dictionary definition is: "*One who believes in supreme power being in the hands of the people through their elected representatives.*" None of these definitions adequately explain our philosophy or aspirations as members of the Irish Republican Movement.

## What is a republican?

Another lecture covers the emergence and development of the republican philosophy. To answer the question, 'What is a republican?' we must retrace cursorily its evolution and principal elements.

The Cromwellian invasion ended the old clan system with its co-operative ownership, democratic laws and practice of collective responsibility for those in need.

The influence of the French revolution against the despotic rule of the king and aristocratic class with its demands of liberty, equality and fraternity, greatly influenced the United Irishmen and Theobald Wolfe Tone in whose writings we find the codification of the three principles which form the basis of the Irish republican philosophy.

## Separatism, secularism and non-sectarianism

On separatism Tone wrote: *"A closer examination into the situation of my native country had very considerably extended my view, and, as I was sincerely and honestly attached to her interests, I made speedily what was to me a great discovery — that the influence of England was the radical vice of our government and consequently that Ireland could never be either free, prosperous or happy until she was independent and that independence was unattainable while the connection with England existed."*

On the question of secularism, our history has many examples of how churches can abuse their position to support the establishment even when the establishment is corrupt, dictatorial and anti-Christian in its policies and practice. Although, like most of the leadership of the United Irishmen, Tone was a Protestant, he saw and understood why the Protestant churches supported England and why sectarian conflicts which kept the Irish masses divided were deliberately kept alive by England.

He wrote of the established church: *"They are not a tenth of the population. They are, and have been for half a century, in the quiet enjoyment of the church, the law, the revenue, the army, the navy, the magistracy, the corporation — in a word the whole of patronage and wealth."*

The United Irishmen, therefore, proposed the breaking of the connection with England and the formation of a secular society — that is, a society in which churches held no power and where religious tolerance would be not only preached but practised. They were aware of the use to which sectarianism was put by England and dedicated themselves to *"...unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of the past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter..."*

With the emergence of the Young Ireland movement, Davis re-introduced the fundamental demand of Tone — separation from England. Fintan Lalor gave Irish republicanism a new base — the land in question. By linking this with the demand for separation the relationship of forces within Irish society of the time was entirely changed. It created the basis for the modern Irish nationalist tradition and for the first time a force capable of taking on the British empire.

Lalor wrote: *"The entire ownership of Ireland moral and material, up to the sun and down to the centre, is vested in the right of the people of Ireland. That they and none but they are the land-owners and law-makers of this island, that all laws are null and void not made by them and all titles to land are invalid not conferred by them."*

In this and all the writings of Lalor, although he was not a scientific socialist, we find, in addition to the doctrine of separation, considerable socialist theory.

The next influence on the development of the philosophy of Irish republicanism was the Irish Republican Brotherhood or Fenian movement. The Fenian movement was inspired by the writings of Tone and sought to achieve the complete separation of Ireland from England by force. It was essentially a national movement based on the American ideas of liberty and freedom. This period was one of great national revival generally and saw the foundation of such organisational expressions as the GAA and Conradh na Gaeilge.

Although, as referred to already, one could find in the writings of the United Irishmen, Young Irelanders and Fenians, elements of socialist theory, at the end of the 19th century, nationalism was the dominant force in Irish republicanism. As we approach the Rising of 1916,

however, we find the IRB realising the necessity of socialism in its revolutionary programme. The best example of this realisation is to be found in the writings of Padraig Pearse. A quote from his 'The Sovereign People' written shortly before the Rising: *"So that the nation's sovereignty extends not only to all men and women of the nation but to all material possessions of the nation, the nation's soil and all its resources, all wealth and wealth-producing processes within the nation. In other words, no private right to prosperity is good against the public right to secure strictly equal rights and liberties to every man and woman within the nation."*

In this period, while Ceannt, Plunkett and Mellows contributed significantly to making socialism an important element of republicanism, there can be no doubt that it was James Connolly who succeeded in making socialism a fundamental part of republicanism. He realised from his readings, experience and early struggle that national separation was not enough; a socialist programme was desperately required to destroy the poverty, inequality and exploitation which existed throughout Ireland. In his political propaganda, particularly in relation to the IRB, he sought to bring home to Irishmen and women the importance of socialism allied to nationalism. There can be little doubt that it was his influence which caused Pearse to write 'The Sovereign People'. Connolly made this point when he very concisely wrote: *"Political and social freedom are not two separate and unrelated ideas but are two sides of the one great principle each being incomplete without the other."*

Connolly realised also that the ownership of Ireland was not just political, that it had an economic basis. He knew that even if the British army left Ireland imperialism would still control the country through its economic grip — through its control over the financial, industrial and agricultural life in the country. How prophetic were his words: *"If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle unless you set about the organisation of the socialist republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her finances, through the whole array of commercial and individual institutions she has planted in the country."*

In the Proclamation of 1916 and Democratic Programme of the First Dail we find evidence of the further development of the socialist dimension. The Proclamation declared *"...the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible."*

Typical of the terms of the Democratic Programme of the First Dail was:-

*"It is the duty of the nation to assure that every citizen shall have opportunity to spend his or her strength in the service of the people."*

*"In return for willing service we, in the name of the republic, declare the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the nation's labour."*

Clearly, therefore, Irish republicanism has not been a static concept but a living, developing and growing ideology. By 1916 it had evolved to embrace five principal elements:-

- Separatism:-** Break the connection with England.
- Non-sectarianism:-** To substitute the common name of Irishman in place of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter.
- Secularism:-** To limit the control of the churches to things spiritual and to treat everyone equal before God.
- Nationalism:-** Language; culture; national identity; and the restoration of the Irish way of life.
- Socialism:-** The ownership of Ireland for the people of Ireland and the subordination of private property to public right and welfare.

Clearly any suggestion that socialism is alien to so-called traditional republicanism is ill-founded. Equally incorrect is any suggestion that in the context of a struggle for national freedom nationalism and socialism do not march together.

There are those, of course, who regard themselves as socialist and will not touch the national struggle. For them there is one basic crunch question: 'Where do you stand on imperialism?' Those who are not against it, by definition, cannot be socialist and those who are against it must fight it.

The Rising of 1916, followed two years later by the popular War of Independence, forced British imperialism to modify the form of its domination of the island. This was done in 1921 in a deal with the emerging capitalists — the strategy was to give formal independence to a

part of the country while carving out an exclusively British enclave in the six north-eastern counties. Their hold on this was guaranteed by the existence of the Protestant caste system which systematically denied democracy and equality to the Catholic minority.

This military occupation of the six counties was designed, and has acted since, as a bridgehead for the economic and socio-cultural domination of the whole island. The nature of the British connection in the post-1921 period, therefore, goes much deeper than the occupation of part of the country by British troops.

In the period since the so-called treaty, imperialism has had the following principal features:-

- The occupation of six counties directly by British troops.
- The economic domination of the six and twenty-six county states by British capital.
- A lack of democracy in the six counties and the use of religious discrimination to divide the working people.
- The exploitation of twenty-six county agriculture by the artificial rigging of the British and, in more recent years, the EEC markets.
- The use of the financial system to channel Irish wealth abroad.
- Political subservience by Dublin governments in foreign policy and trade.
- Collaboration between twenty-six county governments and British and six county administrations and the introduction in both parts of country of a range of repressive legislation designed primarily to defeat the struggle for re-unification.
- Cultural domination by the English language, literature and ways of thinking in all aspects of life.

The imperialist presence in Ireland, covering as it does the entire country and having many aspects and operating at several different levels, requires a comprehensive and thirty-two county response. Only a fool or the politically naive would suggest that imperialism can be defeated by the armed struggle alone, however successful it is, or even by action in the six counties alone.

All the manifestations of imperialism must be fought and all these areas of struggle must be organised and integrated by the active involvement of the people under the leadership of the only revolutionary organisation committed to the defeat of imperialism.

Our job then as republicans, no less as socialists, is to take up the sharpest political contradictions within Ireland, North, and South, irrespective of their class nature whilst orientating the struggles around these contradictions towards political power by the people. Quite obviously the sharpest political contradiction is partition. The issue of partition is central to the struggle against imperialism and by definition against Irish capitalism. For our part the most consistent element of the Irish republican tradition is armed resistance to British imperialism and that must be continued because progress in the struggle at other levels or against other manifestations of imperialism, without doubt, depends on the continuance of the war at a high level. It is from this that we draw our legitimacy.

Given that, we must go about our task of developing the political consciousness and revolutionary potential of the Irish people, North and South. This we do by implementing our programme of economic resistance; by leading them in agitation and direct action on issues such as housing, redundancies, unemployment, discrimination, land, and civil rights issues; in fact on all the many injustices and abuses that workers suffer in a capitalist state. Our purpose is to build a mass movement against oppression and exploitation, a movement of workers and small farmers to overthrow the twin forces of oppression and exploitation in Ireland — British imperialism and capitalism.

This is Irish republicanism as it has evolved through centuries of struggle and political thought. It embraces both nationalism and socialism. Anything short of this is just not worth fighting for and does not justify the loss of one life. It follows that anyone who rejects such an objective rejects republicanism as sure as those who accept the imperialistically imposed border.

To sum up then:- our task as a revolutionary movement at this stage in the Irish struggle is to act as the mass organiser of the people; to lead them in agitational activities on issues such as land, for better working, living and social conditions, showing them in all these fights that their enemies are their landlords and their gombeen exploiters banded together into the establishment. The objective is both nationalist and socialist — a thirty-two county democratic, socialist republic.

