

The Sinn Fein Situation

OPPPOSITION to the capitalist form of society is the chief characteristic of the Socialist programme. Understanding our class position within this system, and the impossibility of removing the social antagonisms that prevail without effecting a change from class to social control of the means of wealth production, our attack is necessarily directed against the system of society known as capitalism.

This concerted attack on the system itself does not, however, entail a cessation of interest in connection with the various modifications proposed by rival cliques and groups within the ranks of the ruling class. Wherever such proposals are pressed forward as being "steps in the direction of socialism," "certain means of freedom," "phases of the age-long struggle for liberty," etc., we make it our business to throw aside the veil of hypocrisy that enshrouds the issue, and reveal the true significance of the question at stake. We oppose capitalism. This also involves an opposition to all that capitalism stands for, and all that stands for capitalism.

The issue we intend to deal with in this article is one of comparatively recent origin—the Sinn Fein movement. The advocates of self-determination for Ireland have done some extensive advertising in the past few years. When it comes to making known the virtues of what they have to offer, the makers of Beecham's Pills, Wrigley's Spearmint, and Post's Grape-nuts, have nothing on the Irish republicans. Scarcely a day passes without recording some new encounter between the forces of imperialist England and republican Ireland.

So consistently and well managed has this advertising campaign been carried on in the United States that political parties, newspaper syndicates, religious and fraternal organizations, and other centres of public opinion are vehemently protesting against the wrongs inflicted on struggling Ireland by their ruthless oppressors. Only a short time ago this truculent attitude was confined to organizations of Irish origin, emphasized occasionally by the intrusion of eloquent propagandists from the old land, who were seeking finances for Erin's cause.

In those days there was not the same incentive to arouse the emotions of our moralists and statesmen as we find at present. England and America were not such keen competitors in the field of commerce. The presence of other rapacious market hounds had a decided tendency to force a closer relationship between the ruling classes of the two countries.

But, now, the scene has changed. The onslaught of commercial Germany has been stopped for the moment, and face to face for the first time in history stand Britain and America, as the leading contestants for the lion's share in a greatly contracted world market. Every weak spot in the financial, legislative, administrative, moral and ethical policy of Britain is magnified a thousand fold, and dilated upon with vigor and alacrity, by those whose interests are enhanced by crushing the aspirations of British capitalists. India, Egypt, and especially Ireland, loom on the horizon as dark malignant clouds of oppression that must be dispersed. The moral nature of the proposition never assumed sufficient proportions to warrant an expression of opinion until the economic problem demanded a solution.

But this campaign for "Irish freedom" is not confined to the organizations representing the interests of American capitalists. Working class parties and papers have caught the tune, and flagrantly display their ignorance of the social malady by joining in the chorus for more freedom for the struggling capitalists of Ireland.

In no single instance have they presented evidence to prove the Sinn Fein to be a revolutionary working class movement. Nothing has been placed on exhibit outside a sickly, sentimental humanit-

arianism that manifests itself through weeping and wailing over the gruesome effect, without any understanding concerning the cause. Even though their knowledge of the Sinn Fein movement was confined to a perusal of the speeches and literature disseminated by its devotees in the United States they could find, even here, sufficient material to exclude them from the category of revolutionary organizations.

During the days when the Peace Conference was in session at Paris, and delegations of Irishmen, with Gaelic names, were attempting to have Ireland represented in peace negotiations, the "Irish World," in New York, was publishing thrilling narratives of how England sought to prevent their representatives from having a voice or a vote in the settlement of the war. Even the Bolsheviki of Russia, their hands reeking with the blood of innocent citizens, and waving the red flag of anarchy in the face of a Christian people, denying the existence of any power above themselves, were looked upon kindly by England who made overtures on their behalf while suppressing the aspirations of Christian Ireland.

This same paper realizing the futility of gaining England's consent made a fervent appeal to France for assistance. They had good reason to expect aid from this quarter. When the anarchistic mobs of Paris took possession of the city in 1871, and threatened the existence of responsible government, was it not Ireland that contributed General McMahon, who was, in a large measure, responsible for restoring law and order?

The Sinn Fein propagandists who have toured this side of the Atlantic have repeatedly assured their audience that nothing resembling the state of affairs in Russia would ever be countenanced by themselves. Their ideal of republican government was to be found in the United States. That liberty of speech and assemblage, so charmingly exemplified in every penitentiary throughout the land; that freedom from autocracy is well illustrated in the annals of Wall Street; these are the goal of Irish ambition, and not social control of the means of wealth production.

A glance at the recent history of Ireland will suffice to corroborate the assertions of their doctrinaires in America. It is not possible in a short essay to go deeply into the causes of estrangement between England and Ireland. For several centuries the conflict has raged. England, seeking the dominant position in industry and commerce, was compelled to curtail the manufacture of goods in Ireland, just as she found it necessary to pursue the same policy in regard to America. These countries must be made to function as the base for supplying food and raw materials to the manufacturing population of England. Whatever attempts were made to establish industries on the outside were crushed with a ruthless hand. Shipbuilding, sail making, cotton, woollen and silk manufacturers, were alternatively attempted, but all to no avail, as the political powers in the hands of the English rulers was quite adequate to legalize their dictates.

Suppression, however, did not signify surrender. If legal means of redress were prohibited, then, illegal means must be resorted to. Secret societies became fashionable. The Peep-o'-Day Boys, the Defenders, the Right Boys, Steel Boys, Threshers, Ribbon-men, Terry Alts, Molly Maguires, Rockites, and many others sprang into existence, in most cases for the purpose of defending the farmers from the landlords. But the powers at Westminster could not see the necessity of decentralization in government, and a well equipped force was continually on hand to hunt down and disperse these secret societies.

A story of the different agitations, and the orators who advocate them, would fill a book. Suf-

fice it to notice that out of centuries of strife and bloodshed evolved the Home Rule for Ireland movement, with Parnell, Redmond, O'Connor, Dillon, and Devlin as its eloquent champions. The main object of this movement was to secure for the landed and manufacturing class of Ireland, the privilege of conducting their internal affairs to suit themselves, without being subject to the whims and caprices of English law-makers. It was never their intention to sever relationship with the Empire, nor to extend their sovereignty over the department of foreign affairs. The methods proposed for attaining this object were political, and Home Rule for Ireland soon became one of the important issues in British politics.

Sane, safe, and respectable as the Home Rulers' programme was designed to be, it never developed to that stage where the privilege sought became the law of the land. The different British political parties, in several election campaigns, made use of the Irish question to enhance their own interests, but never seriously attempted to solve the problem to the satisfaction of its spokesmen. Even the chauvinistic utterances of Parnell and Redmond proved inadequate to stir the legislators of Westminster to grant the moderate demands of industrial Ireland.

This failure to attain their ends by peaceful means, while retaining their position as part of the Empire, stimulated the handicapped Irish manufacturers to adopt a more drastic programme and turn their desires into legal enactment by more forcible methods. To perform this function the Sinn Fein movement had its origin in the early part of the present century. Complete separation from England, and the fullest measure of self-determination for Ireland was demanded. The national resources must be released from foreign control, and Irish industry given an opportunity to develop and take its place side by side with the other nations of the world.

Religious and moral phases of the question were shoved in the background, and the economic basis was clearly revealed. With the breaking of English fetters manufacturing would flourish, and soon the population would increase at a terrific rate. Twenty millions of people could easily be accommodated under the new regime. To the capitalists in Ireland, whose efforts were thwarted by their fellow capitalists in England, this extension of industry, and consequent increase in the number of those who must be exploited, would no doubt be a matter of considerable import. But, so far as the Irish workers' position is concerned they need only look at the condition of their fellow slaves in England, where industrial development is freely assisted, and a large population exists, to see what is in store for themselves when that glorious stage of self-determination is ushered in.

In the parliamentary election of 1918 the Sinn Fein Party was accorded a notable support at the polls. Seventy candidates were elected to promote the cause. Out of this large delegation there is not a single member of the revolutionary working class. Not one who is in any way connected or concerned with the abolition of class society. The landed, manufacturing, and professional classes are all represented, and all are determined to keep in existence the present form of society. All that interests them in regard to the Irish workers is how they can best continue their exploitation, and maintain them in a state of apathy and indifference to their class position.

The Provisional Government formed during the Easter Rebellion of 1916, in its declaration to the people of Ireland, clearly portrays the character of the movement. Not a line in that declaration to lead one to believe that classes exist in Irish society.

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