

## Irish notes

As the Sinn Fein movement appears to be gaining prominence in Ireland and enlisting the sympathies of large numbers of Irish working men, it becomes necessary for Socialists to state clearly and definitely their attitude toward this movement. With this idea in view the following lines have been penned.

The pamphlet entitled *The Sinn Fein Policy*, published by the national council of the Sinn Fein movement, lays down their position.

This pamphlet shows clearly that Sinn Fein is the revolt of the Irish commercial class against landlords and the Government that supports the landlords to the detriment of the industrial capitalists. This movement gains its catch-cry and working class support on account of Ireland's peculiar national position. The landlords having been for years mainly English and the governmental powers administered from London, the landlords naturally turned to the Government for support and got it. The position was further complicated by the development of the English capitalists, who were not so foolish as to permit commercial rivalry at their very doors, especially from a country where the standard of living was comparatively low, food being fairly abundant and cheap. Consequently steps were taken to throttle the anticipated rivalry. In the same way when the early English merchants were struggling for control of the carrying trade of the world, all available methods were pressed into use to crush their principal competitors, the Dutch, and the latter eventually went down.

We are not concerned here as to whether those who support the Sinn Fein movement are sincere or not. We are endeavouring to show Irish working men the plain, bald facts of the position, regardless of whether these facts are palatable or not. People's views are, in the main, the product of their particular social environment—they see the world from the point of view of the class into which they are born and with which their interests are bound up. Consequently the members of the small commercial firm (the germ of the large industrial concern) burn with injustice and struggle to break the bonds that interfere with the expansion of their business. They bawl at the tops of their voices for freedom, like their brothers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in France, but bye and bye we shall see that the freedom they desire (also like that of their French brethren) is commercial freedom—the liberty to exploit nature and the worker to the fullest extent possible.

We, who are working men, however, should concern ourselves with the bonds that bind us to the wheel of capital—that doom us forever to the toil and sweat of slavery.

In the *Tracts for Irishmen* there is a booklet entitled *Ireland Looks into the Mirror* which describes with some detail Hungary's so-called march to freedom under Louis Kossuth and Francis Deak, and a parallel is drawn between Ireland and Hungary, Irishmen being invited to emulate the Hungarians in their struggle, which has resulted in the "resurrection of Hungary". But what is really the position in Hungary? Free Hungary and Free Italy have meant nothing to the working class of the respective countries. A short time before the Mutual Murdering Association commenced the sanguinary operations in Europe the condition of affairs in Hungary was appalling. The wages were at starvation rate and thousands were actually starving. In Buda-Pesth alone there were 30,000 unemployed; the wages were 6d to 8d for a day of 10 to 12 hours, and hundreds were employed at 2d a day. Truly Free Hungary had brought its workers to a glorious pass! In the issue of our paper that was published at the time were given full details of the position. Now the workers of Hungary, in common with the workers of other countries, are murdering each other for the great god Capital. Evidently one of the benefits conferred upon the working class of Hungary and Italy by their resurrection from oppression has been the opportunity to pour out their blood on behalf of their masters in the struggle for international trade routes and the markets of the world—a truly remarkable privilege!

In case of any doubts arising as to whether we have stated the case correctly in contending that the mainspring of the Sinn Fein movement is the desire for power and expansion on the part of Irish Industrial Capitalists we will give a few quotations from authoritative sources. In the first place we will quote from the pamphlet *The Sinn Fein Policy*, to which we have already referred.

"With the development of her manufacturing arm will proceed the rise of a national middle class in Ireland and a trained national democracy." (p. 15.)

“That the General Council of the Councils should have the country surveyed with a view to the profitable development of its natural resources, and having had the cost and return estimated as accurately as possible, should then invite the Irish-American millionaires to do what, at the St. Patrick’s banquet in New York, several professed themselves anxious to do—develop the country industrially. We can offer them 174,000,000 tons of coal, the finest stone in Europe, and an inexhaustible supply of peat to operate on, and we can offer them all the facilities possessed by the County Councils and Rural Councils of Ireland, and the assistance and goodwill of the Irish people in turning our coal, our stone, and our turf into gold. They can offer us in return profitable employment for our people, and an enormous increase of strength, socially, politically, and industrially.” (p. 17.)

“A necessary organisation is an agricultural and manufacturing union—a union of manufacturers and farmers, classes who at the present time, through an extraordinary delusion, are unfriendly to each other, and fail to realise their interdependence. The farmer is indifferent about the industrial revival, failing to realise the increased market an Ireland with a manufacturing arm means to the agriculturist: the manufacturer is indifferent to the agricultural interest, failing to realise that the extension of agriculture—the extension of tillage—means the extension of the market for his products.” (p. 10.)

“Through the lack of a mercantile marine we are debarred from our best markets, deprived of our share in the world’s carrying trade, and are lost to Europe’s interest. We lost sixty years ago one of the greatest opportunities—a share in the China trade, because we had no mercantile navy, and as a consequence the China market knows nothing of our linens, and we procure our tea through England. We lose for the same reason to-day our share in the Indian trade, which would be gladly given us if we only had a marine to work it, and we are losing yearly our share in the European and American trade for the same reason.” (p. 18.)

“In an excellent letter addressed to the Board of Guardians the Cork Chemical and Drug Co., Ltd., put the issue clearly. It wrote: ‘It is a comparatively simple matter for English capitalists to crush out their Irish competitors, and we know that this has been too often the fate of Irishmen striving to promote the manufactures of the country, but once the obstacle is removed it is easy enough for them to advance prices, and thus obtain compensation for preliminary losses. It is to this system that we, as Irish manufacturers and large employers of labour, object, but we are always ready to meet the ordinary competition of business, so long as this is conducted on fair lines.’ Many of the Irish Boards of Guardians have responded to this letter, but, unfortunately, the bulk of the unions have fallen into the net spread by the English ring, and in consequence a very large sum of Irish money, not a penny of which need have passed out of the country, finds its way this year into England’s pocket. Under the Sinn Fein policy such a deplorable error could not occur. The action of the Boards would, of course, be a united one, and no possibility would be left as far as they were concerned for a syndicate of unscrupulous English capitalists to crush out the home manufacturer and the home trader.”

*The Irishman* of May 12<sup>th</sup> last refers to the Cork Industrial Development Association under the heading of “A Live Association”, and two of the items quoted as evidence of its usefulness are the following:

“The Information Bureau of Irish Industries attached to the Association, has been, and still continues to be, availed of by correspondents drawn from all parts of Ireland and Great Britain, and, also, from Continental and American countries, and has, admittedly, resulted in securing for Irish firms orders running into many hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling.”

“The promotion of Industrial harmony between employers and workers in Ireland has long been a plank in the Association’s platform, and its successful endeavours to effect a satisfactory settlement of the recent disputes in the building trades in Cork City were greatly appreciated by the Cork public.”

When an association like the above has the support of the official Sinn Fein organ it shows plainly what the attitude of the principal people concerned in this movement is toward the Irish working class. The whole of the above quotations prove the truth of our contention. The continuance of the private property system is the central idea in the movement, and so long as private property remains the

miseries that necessarily flow therefrom will remain also and continue to afflict the workers under the Irish Republic.

In the pamphlet from which we have quoted Germany is instanced as the country par excellence to be emulated by Ireland. But to what has industrial development brought Germany? To the dawn of the Social Revolution, some will truly reply. But then this is not the point of view of the publishers of the pamphlet. They are glorifying the pre-war state of Germany. The German peasant, who used to enjoy the fresh air working in the fields with nothing over him but the sky, while his wife spun at the cottage door, is now cooped up in a factory for the greater part of his waking hours, with the grim spectre of unemployment to haunt him for ever and make his life wretched. The once open country is now studded thickly with great factories, ugly industrial towns, and depressing mining districts. As a result of developing her industrial resources Germany has become one of the greatest industrial countries in the world. The German capitalist can put his feet under the mahogany with the capitalists of any nation, whilst the German workers, who toiled in tragic weariness to make these capitalists what they are, can hold their own with the workers of any nation for poverty, misery, and destitution.

The pamphlet in question also dilates largely on the increase of unemployment in Ireland, and the development of its resources through the investment of capital by the American millionaires. Are the Sinn Fein party anxious to see Ireland smothered with the ugly, stifling, sweating factories and mills that already encumber part of the North of Ireland, and smother England, Germany, America, and other countries? Is it employment Irish workers want, or is it the opportunity to work for themselves instead of working for others who live on the products of their toil? What the Sinn Feiners would have us believe, apparently, is that we want more employers in Ireland.

To sum it all up, the plea of this pamphlet is simply the echo of the plea of the English capitalists in their early struggle for markets. "The more markets we can get the more employment we can give," cried they, and went merrily on their way murdering children from six years of age in their factories and destroying the lives of women and girls in their mines in the benevolent endeavour to give as much employment as possible, and of course, just by the way, rake in as much profit as possible.

The Irish Republic the Sinn Feiners are after is but the counterpart of France and America, where year by year the capitalist sweats dividends out of his helpless workers.

What part can the Irish workers, devoid of capital, take in the Industrial Revival except the toiling part? All these revivals are useless to the worker until he owns the product of his toil, then he will be able to enjoy to the full all the advantages to be obtained. So long as private property is the order of the day it matters little to the propertyless Irish worker (the vast majority of the population) who rules Ireland.

"Agin the British Government", Separation with a King, Lords, and Commons for Ireland (Constitution of 1683), and full liberty to exploit Irish workers, are about the sum total of Sinn Fein. Some are ultra-revolutionary, and will have "no bloom' king but a republic"—It is tantamount to the bosses saying they'll exploit you with caps on instead of swanking in with top hats on. Republic or Constitutional Monarchy, it works out the same—the workers are always the bottom dogs.

The writers of these notes are Irish workers who have long since turned a deaf ear to the empty phrases of Nationalism, and they look forward with hopeful eyes to the day when Ireland shall be a land of peace and prosperity—its wealth owned and controlled by its workers—and a harmonious member of the great international Socialist Republic. This object, we claim, is far more worthy of the attention and support of Irish workers than the empty phrases and chimeras of Sinn Fein.

Mick and Mack  
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