

The Significance of Sinn Fein

Psychological, Political, and Economic.

Jack White

1919

Contents

PSYCHOLOGICAL	3
POLITICAL	5
ECONOMIC	9

PSYCHOLOGICAL

PSYCHOLOGY is the science of the soul. The soul for the purposes of the present article means the sum of the powers and faculties in a human being, by which he feels and thinks and acts. Can we get some grasp of the relation of these faculties to each other in an individual and then apply them to present conditions in Ireland in such a way that both the race and individuals may understand themselves and their inter-connection better? I think we can.

The most elementary psychological division in an individual is between his sub-consciousness and surface consciousness. By the former I mean here not so much those freakish powers of memory and prevision, which are manifested in mediumistic or hypnotic trance, as the whole sum of instincts and tendencies which are inherited, or, at any rate, inborn in the individual, which are so much part of him that he may be quite unconscious of them, and is certainly unconscious of how they arose. By the latter I mean those beliefs, opinions, tendencies, and habits of reasoning which are formed by contact with outer environment, which depend on outer experience and observation, and may be in direct opposition to inner instinctive emotion.

Happy and rare is the man in whom the two consciousness are reconciled and harmonious, who finds, or makes, his outer environment the expression of his deepest instincts and desires. As the world is now, indeed, any such complete reconciliation is impossible for any man or woman in whose sub-consciousness there well up deep and creative emotions.

The sub-conscious soul life is checked and thwarted by environment. People of strong feeling must try to remould it nearer to the heart's desire. Immovable, by the effort of a few solitary individuals, the best of these are forced to compromise, or, failing that, shatter to bits, not the world, but themselves. The revolt against environment to be effective must be collective.

We see to-day two main kinds of collective revolt, that of subject races and subject classes. They may be (indeed, generally are) quite distinct. A class may revolt against the pressure of a social system, although the race of which it forms part has evolved that system as part of its character and culture. Or a race may revolt without formulating any distinct class protest. The race revolt corresponds to the subconsciousness, drawing its impetus from inborn racial instinct. The class revolt is an affair of the surface consciousness, concerned with the modification or reconstruction of external conditions. Where the two revolts unite in one the whole National Being is engaged.

But what is the relation between the two aspects of revolt thus fused, differing as they do in their motive and inspiration. W. H. Myers has defined genius as a "subliminal uprush," that is to say, the emergence of elements which remain latent below the threshold of consciousness in less gifted men into harmonious fusion with the reasoning and expressive powers of the surface personality. Where such harmonious fusion is absent we have not genius, but madness or hysteria. It would seem, therefore, that the inborn race-inspiration of Ireland, which Sinn Fein represents, has got to be harmonised with the conclusion and demands of Irish Labour, drawn from and directed towards external environment. Failing that, Labour's efforts will lack the subliminal element of genius, and Sinn Fein be in danger of lapsing into hysteria.

The Irish race is pre-eminently intuitive, that is to say, it feels its conclusions rather than thinks them, and often proceeds direct from feeling to action, which subsequent events fully justify, though reasoned calculation would have condemned. Its genius in this respect rests on a radical difference of psychology, a sealed book to John Bull, and to all peoples devoid of the education of untamed suffering necessary to read it.

In civilised life, as we know it, it is usual to base mental conclusions on actually observable facts or their easily predictable consequences. Practical men and nations sneer at the colouring of thought by emotion, and consider that practical thought should confine itself to hard external facts. The conflict of this outlook with the Christian teaching that the Kingdom of Heaven is within and cometh not by observation should be obvious; but to those who resent the implication that Christianity is concerned with practical affairs or that it is man's business to establish the kingdom without as well as within, it may be well to point out that the teaching of elementary psychology is equally plain. The limitation of thought to the data of external experience implies stagnation. Mere knowledge taken alone is a matter of receiving, not of initiating. Feeling makes the movement with which knowledge deals. The intellect by itself moves nothing, and the quest of reality, though it may be greatly assisted thereby, would never be undertaken by the intellect alone. Without emotion, will would be dormant and the intellect lapse into a mere calculating machine. The whole of man's environment is built up, however short it fall of the mark, at the spur of emotion in search of his happiness and well being. To deny the place of emotion, therefore, as an element in constructive thought is to cut off the stream of life from its source. Consciousness is always trying to run ahead of the data of reason as given in the past and present. The soul of Man, while it feels there is more to love and more to know, can never be satisfied by turning over all possible rearrangements and combinations of its effort up to date. It must make a new effort, to create by its own intensity something nearer to the heart's desire. To deny the reasonableness of emotion is to give no rational sanction for the condition of progress. So much for the criticism sometimes seen in the English press that Sinn Fein is an emotion not a policy. What has already been said and what follows is an attempt to show in its true light the vast significance of Sinn Fein's function in re-introducing pure emotion as a factor in Western world-politics.

The longer dwelt on, the deeper does that significance become. It will be more fully unfolded in the political and economic sections of this paper. Before leaving the psychological, however, some aspects of national emotion as a cohesive force as well as a driving force may be noted. The individual can only trace the roots of his own tendencies in the past history of the race to which he belongs. Sinn Fein and the Gaelic League, therefore, in isolating the national spirit from foreign influences and reviving the national past, not only enhance the consciousness of each individual, but bring to bear a great combining force to weld individuals together. *Quot homines tot sententiae* may be roughly translated "as many opinions as there are minds to form them." The intellectual element can neither initiate nor spontaneously combine. This is the explanation why anti-militarists and international socialists, however clear their intellectual grasp of their tenets, succumbed and fell into line with the predatory emotions of the few in their respective countries. The binding-force of a common emotion was too weak until the opening of the great dynamo in Russia. For good or ill, not intellect but emotion is the element of agreement and combination among men, whether their combination is that of wolves who hunt their prey, or of bees who make their honey in common.

Two great emotional forces make for this unity in Ireland, her nationality and her religion, and since they are neither of them aggressive and predatory, and both of them dependent on attraction rather than compulsion, her unity is spontaneous, and so proof against external force, and her influence is the great bulwark against the dominance of the brute combination resting on compulsion in the Western world.

In conclusion of this section: the functions of Sinn Fein and Irish Labour have been compared to the dual functions of the mind, receiving its material from the inner or sub-consciousness on

the one hand and external environment on the other. Sinn Fein seeks to restore the soul, Labour to recreate the body. Will soul and body fit? Whitman's line springs to my pen. "I swear to you the body is the soul." Irish Labour is in tune with that great uncompromising movement of the world's workers, which prepares a freer body for all and each of the nations of the world. In the past the soul has assumed an air of some superiority to the body, in dogma, in untested moral dictation, in the subordination of economics to politics. But this is the day of the resurrection of the flesh, the uprising of the despised mass of humanity condemned to bodily labour and denied a self-directing soul. In freeing their bodies so shall they free the souls of themselves and all of us who were pitifully less in that we thought ourselves greater than they. Let the seekers for the soul of Ireland observe this new up-heaving body of Labour with deference, for in it lies a new world soul, and Ireland's own.

POLITICAL

The connection between politics and economics is so close that the division between them must be one of careful definition to avoid being one of loose thinking. In treating, therefore, of the political aspect of Sinn Fein, as distinct from the economic, I propose to call politics all movements based on the tacit acceptance of the continuance of the basis of Government with which we are at present familiar. This may be described as Parliamentaryism, democratic in form, in that the opinions of the people, or a great majority of them are nominally reflected in the legislation imposed on them, or, at least, in the election of the legislators. Whether the present method is or can be democratic in substance may transpire as I proceed, and the relation of Ireland to politics, her great and growing disabilities may serve to point the distinction between "democratic" politics and economics in the sense I employ the word. If political forms, as I hold, are dissolving for lack of economic substance, observation of the process of dissolution will serve to clear the issue, and help to reveal economics as the basis of the politics of the future. It is not, of course, to be inferred that there has been no economic basis to politics as we have known them; far from it. But the instability of that basis has been the cause of the instability of the whole world-order and the terrific upheaval which it has just undergone. That things cannot resettle on the old basis would seem to be a sufficiently obvious, even respectable, opinion, for has not Mr. Lloyd George told us to look for "fundamental reconstruction." But the principle of the new foundation, and wherein it differs from the old, is far to seek in the utterances of English politicians. Ireland's aloofness from the recent World War has certainly not been imputed to her for righteousness outside her own borders. Yet, perhaps, this aloofness may be explicable by other reasons than callous indifference to the rights of small nations other than her own. She may have felt herself planted on the new foundation which Mr. Lloyd George omits to define, and been wisely, even altruistically, anxious to conserve it for the benefit of society at large. "Fundamental reconstruction" is handicapped if all the foundations are in the melting pot together. In the general collapse of those built upon the sand, any house with even a partial foundation of rock has the more need to stand.

What, then, is the justification for the attitude expressed in the phrase: "It is not Ireland's war." When the outbreak of the war violently threw society off its balance, the sluice gates built by democracy for its own protection were destroyed, and the current of the people's force was guided into the various streams of bellicose nationalism. Despite an intellectual realisation of

the seeds of World War contained in the Capitalistic system, the great majority of International Socialists succumbed at the first blast of the trumpet, and the Internationale ceased to be anything but a name. The psychological reason for this collapse has already been given, that the combining power of emotion was on the side of race and overbore the intellectual grasp of a doctrine not yet ingrained in the subconsciousness. But why did Ireland's racial emotion enable her to stand firm? In the answer to this question lies the key of the door between Anglo Irish politics and world-economics. It was not necessary for Ireland to have so much as heard the word Socialism to have a healthy distrust of Imperialism and pierce the disguise of its blandishments. And Imperialism is at once the father and the child of Capitalism. So Ireland fought without talking for the ideals which most of the Socialists talked about while fighting for their opposite. But since this Section sets out to deal with the political significance of Sinn Fein, let us get to the point and say at once that Sinn Fein's political function can only be not only to break the political link with Westminster, but to abrogate politics on the basis with which we are familiar. And since the formation of the new basis can hardly lie with other than industrial organisation in the first place, we believe the function of Sinn Fein to be to encourage and co-ordinate such organisation. There are half a dozen insuperable reasons why Ireland's united emancipation as a nation must attend a programme world-wide and man-deep in its appeal, disintegrating from within the enemies that are invincible from without, and welding into one the separate elements of her own being in a manner that Sinn Fein alone can never achieve. Take the question of Ulster. Speaking as an Ulsterman with up-to-date knowledge of Ulster conditions, I assert that the only chance of combining the two racially distinct sections of Ireland is a programme which will make the liberation of Ireland arise automatically from the emancipation of the Irish workers. It is necessary to find something to unite the soul of Ireland, North and South, to prevent the partition of her body. National emancipation arising out of human emancipation was the ideal which worked the combination in '98, and it must be the same again. But if any are sanguine enough to believe that a population of somewhat unimaginative Scotch Protestants will embrace the ideals of Celtic nationality simply because it is Celtic, let them do so. Let us follow the recent development of that nationality itself in its struggle for freedom, and see if any but the explanations of two Socialists, Connolly and Karl Marx, will fit the past and present facts or provide for the conquest of future obstacles. What is the position of Ireland today? To quote the Belfast Newsletter - "With regard to Ireland, the election has cleared the air. It is now an open issue between the maintenance of the Union and an Independent Irish Republic." And in the new Westminster Parliament there is now a clear majority of Unionists over every other Party. There are also, I am informed, 80,000 British troops in Ireland. Glancing abroad we find Mr. Daniels proclaiming the need of a supreme American navy, M. Clemenceau declaring himself a realist and planning that the war to end war shall in no way disturb the old game of military preparedness; not to mention the unanimous intention to make Germany pay, after an armistice signed on the basis of no annexations and no indemnities, to the tune of something approaching the total national debts of the principal allied belligerents. These facts are worth mention, as indicating that the temper of the world's present rulers and their aims are not such as depend on moral persuasion themselves, or offer rosy prospects for its success as the sole weapon of their opponents. Nevertheless, no man is more convinced than the writer that an Independent Irish Republic has got to be and will be, the present English Government's refusal, notwithstanding. But how? How was Ireland solidified into the Western bulwark against servile Imperialism? By a rising, of which the driving force was the Labour Citizen Army. How was the great Capitalistic menace of conscription defeated? By a strike of Irish Labour. I have no wish to

minimise the part played by other sections of the community, but I believe I give honour where honour is due to the class that has been and must continue to be the corner-stone of Ireland's resistance and liberation. The facts, so far, fit Connolly's theory that in the struggle for liberty of any subject nation the owning and employing class are forced by economic pressure to make terms with the oppressor with whom and whose system they become linked by a hundred golden threads of investments and the like. Thus, the onus of the struggle is thrown more and more on the working class. But what of Sinn Fein? I reply the vast majority of Sinn Fein do belong to the working class in the widest sense of the term, and that in so far as they are unable to exercise alone a force greater than aeroplanes and machine guns they will be compelled to unite with the workers who can exercise such a force or relinquish their object. Ireland has in the recent election disavowed the class that has made terms with the oppressor. Sinn Fein stands for the principle of no compromise in their stead. But assuming the disappointment of hopes in President Wilson, where shall Sinn Fein look for the accomplishment of that principle in practice? Sinn Fein must buy its Socialistic education, but any instructed Socialist could foretell that Ireland has nothing to hope from President Wilson, granting him, for the sake of argument, the best intentions in the world. Mr. Wilson is not a divine being, but the President of a Capitalistic Republic, and any League of Nations under the patronage of Capitalistic Governments can only be a league of exploiting rulers against exploited peoples, from which Ireland can expect nothing but reinforced coercion, for, to quote Connolly again, the cause of oppressed nations and oppressed classes is one and the same.

Thus it is that the really instructed International Socialist is the best and only practical Nationalist. Karl Marx declares that the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, though international in substance, must first be national in form, as the proletariat must first settle accounts with the bourgeoisie each in its own country. Lucky for Ireland, she has settled that account with the ballot box instead of the bayonet. She now is near presenting an united front against the English bourgeoisie, with their eternally irreconcilable ideas. Here a remark attributed to Jaures is apposite: *La classe ouvriere Brillanique c'est une classe bourgeoise* (The English working class is a bourgeois class), and so as long as they are fed with the crumbs of their master's exploitations, the mass of them seems likely to remain. But the crumbs will run out, and there is a small but virile minority, not the Pacifists, who are tired of crumbs already.

To return to my statement that Sinn Fein's function was transitional. The policy of abstention from Westminster is excellent as far as it goes. The question is, can it go any further in the direction of setting up any form of "Parliamentary" Government in College Green, and would it be in the line of progress if it could? I answer both in the negative. It is as little to be supposed that the British Government, as at present constituted, will hesitate to suppress by force a rival assembly in Dublin, as that the Irish people will be overawed or thwarted by that force. They will simply be driven to other means against which The force is powerless, less invitingly simple, but infinitely more stable than a Parliament on the bourgeois model. A true self-determination of a whole people cannot be achieved under the forms of Government that have heretofore passed for democracy.

Parliamentarianism, as it has been spoke, is as obsolete as a wooden plough. Democracy was the watchword with which the bourgeoisie obtained power. By the same watchword they seek to hold it. They mean by democracy that the people should vote, and work, and pay for them; their democracy is far more outraged by its concrete fulfilment as in Russia than by its abstract denial as in the old Germany. Even were Sinn Fein bourgeois in feeling or aim, as it emphatically

is not, nothing but concrete democracy can possess the attractive or resisting power to realise Sinn Fein's undoubted aim of an Independent Ireland. Concrete democracy means the abolition of wage-slavery, which in Ireland, more even than in most countries, because of the numerical weakness of Labour, would be postponed, sine die, by any Parliament. The abolition of wage slavery, the workers' independence, can no more be achieved through an Irish Parliament in the first place than Irish Independence could have been achieved through an English one. The only education for liberty is liberty, taken possession of and practised. Sinn Fein intends rightly to deny the substance of English rule by refusing to pay taxes. So must the workers deny the substance of Capitalist rule by refusing to pay profits. And so far from this refusal to pay profits being a separate issue from Ireland's national independence, it is on that refusal that her united freedom must depend. The ascendancy caste in Ulster are the fortified outposts of England's rule in Ireland, and well are they rewarded for their position of honour. Ulster is the profiteer's paradise. Labour, except in Belfast, and largely even there, is almost unorganised. There are engineers in Ballymena today getting 31s a week, when the Belfast rate where this trade is organised is £3 12S. So intense has been the ignorance and bigotry, that not long since in Ballymena Labour organisers had to get police protection back to the station after attempting to address a meeting on purely Labour matters. But this very abnormal backwardness is the very factor making for revolutionary progress. Psychology is a science as exact or more exact than physics. If water accumulates to a certain level in a reservoir and is excluded from a dammed off area it will rush in with redoubled force when the dam is removed, and the level of the water in the excluded area will rise temporarily above the remainder. The emancipation of Labour has reached a certain level in all the world except Ulster. Ulster is becoming aware of the fact slowly but surely. Her workers have not yet realised that they have dammed themselves off from the twentieth century by their concentration on damning the Pope, but, then, they have not yet fully realised the existence of the 20th century any more than the non-existence of the Pontiff of their imagination. I submit that the actuality of the former must oust from their consciousness the phantasm of the latter, that this realisation of injurious illusion must come with a sudden impetus in proportion to their distance below the level of the time spirit. Their very lack of organisation combined with the force of belated indignation, will tend to make them skip the stage of trade-union organisation for sops and assert the reality which their Protestant spirit has been perverted to obscure and deny, the self-acting freedom of each individual in the collectivity. In other words, the abolition of a wage-slave class, and the control of industry by its creators.

Ireland has a greater task than the setting up of a bourgeois democracy on the English model, for she herself is the scene of the exposure of that democracy's deep-rooted fraudulence. Under it, the gang possessing economic and political control abrogate democracy as soon as they see their control threatened, and prepare to throw machine-gun bullets when they can no longer throw dust in the people's eyes. It should not be necessary to offer further proof of this to Irishmen. The Lane gun-running, the Curragh mutiny, the wholesale arrest of Sinn Fein leaders, and their imprisonment at this moment are proof enough.

The continuance of subject classes and nations is too necessary to bourgeois society for Governments representing that society to permit their genuinely democratic emancipation. In Ireland they have repeatedly abrogated it themselves and supported and rewarded its abrogation by their "fortified outposts." In Russia they demand and are endeavouring to enforce that the working class should withdraw from the concrete democracy they have conquered to reconquer it by abstract democratic means. The Bolsheviks are tyrants and anarchists who suppressed the

constituent assembly, and Russia must be rescued for democracy, which means the restoration of Capitalistic industry and the recovery of their interest for a host of cosmopolitan fundholders. We all know the force of habit, and a social order is infinitely more tenacious of its habits than an individual. The forms of Government reflect the social habits of life. Any fundamental change in the economic order of a State must create for itself a new form of Government, and insistence on the old form is a subtle but utterly disingenuous means of smothering the new order at birth, of spoiling the new wine by pouring it into old bottles.

So much for the sacredness of constituent assemblies, called into being before a fundamental and progressive change has had time to leaven the habits of a people and create a governmental form to express itself.

We thank, therefore, both Sinn Fein for separating Ireland from the form of Parliamentaryism which has hitherto blessed us, and the British Government for its determination to prevent us saddling ourselves with a native version of the same blessing. Between them they help us to build better than they know. They keep open the field and compel the preparation of some form of Government based on the sure foundation of contact with the actual lives of the people, and expressive of their needs. And if such Government should develop on the lines of the Russian Soviets, it will be from no unreflective imitation, but because the said Soviets are the natural means for co-ordinating the social activities of free men and supplying their common necessities.

ECONOMIC

At the commencement of the "political" section of this paper, I defined as politics all movements based on the tacit acceptance of the continuance of the basis of politics with which we are at present familiar. Throughout the section in question I attempted to show the instability of that basis, and to indicate the subsidence on to a new foundation already in progress. But the representatives of the unstable equilibrium who did not shrink from the war are not likely to shrink from maintaining it if they can by means of the peace. A Capitalistic peace is indeed a far greater menace than a Capitalistic war, for the latter separates its authors into hostile camps, and promotes enquiry among their victims as to the causes for which they are asked to die. Whereas the former bids fair to substitute for the unstable balance of power between Capitalistic States a League of Governments foisted by armed force on the bewildered and unrepresented peoples of the world. The discredited secret diplomacies of Europe, or such of them as have not been overthrown by revolution, band themselves together to prevent the revolution of their own States and promote counter-revolution in the others. This amiable intention is advanced to within measurable distance of realisation under a thickening screen of camouflage about brotherhood and altruism, amid the plaudits of all the Broadbents of Anglo-Saxondom on both sides the Atlantic. When an indiscreet Latin gives the show away by advocating the old militarism pure and simple, they drown his words with their hosannas and go on diverting the troops from the Eastern battleground to Russia. It is high time for Ireland to realise that the stupefied people are entrusting the old gang of their overpaid and under-controlled servants with an enormously enhanced power to enforce their will and instead of becoming infected with that stupefaction, to consider what she is going to do about it.

It is no longer with England alone that Ireland has to reckon, but with a League of Allied Nations, banded to defend and continue the Capitalistic system. Ireland must restate her national

position in international terms, and she has only to think it out to be able to do so in a way which will at once integrate her nationhood and disintegrate the national and inter-national cohesion of her foes. In pointing to England as the sole enemy, Sinn Fein may be said to be right for the past, but wrong for the future, for there are two Englands rapidly separating into hostile camps along economic lines. Ireland suffered in the past at England's hands the simplest form of economic subjection - the conquest and confiscation of her land. By the superimposition of the feudal system of land tenure on the Irish clan system of communal ownership, the land passed into the hands of the few and with it the basis of all the means of subsistence. The dispossession of the many is the first step in their enslavement, and the worldwide exploitation of Labour to day is the logical outcome of the system of private ownership and hereditary lordship of land. By victory in the Land War the Irish farmers may be said to have pulled out the roots of the feudal system, but not to have destroyed its poisonous fruits. The restoration of the land to those who work it is only the first round in the contest between Capital and Labour, and there is a danger that the winning of the first round may be a positive handicap to success in the second, if the comparative prosperity of the farmers tends to make them unite to enforce the status quo on the labourers. Here we have an example of the way in which material prosperity can militate against spiritual freedom, and it may be well to clear our minds on the subject. The spiritual life of a nation is not something apart from its material welfare.

Just the reverse. It is that form of self-expression which ensures the vital and material well being of the whole of a nation. Materialism means the assertion by a part of interests incompatible with those of the whole. From this definition we may pass to see how spiritual in the fullest sense of the word is Ireland's destiny, for her national emancipation has awaited through the centuries the dawn of the day of liberation for the whole of Europe, perhaps for the whole world. Sinn Fein points rightly to England as the introducer of a disease foreign to Irish life. But does Sinn Fein realise that since the disease has become worldwide the cure must be worldwide, too. In Russia the disease has been diagnosed as a cancer of worldwide extension, and so far as the authority of the Bolshevik Government extends the cancer has been cut out. That authority is steadily extending till we have a leader in the Times, headed "Bolshevik Imperialism." The uprising of the workers of the world against that very Capitalism which is the underlying cause of England's stranglehold on Ireland, both for strategic and economic reasons, moves on apace. Did Sinn Fein grasp this, we believe it would look less to the President of a Capitalistic Republic and more to the principles which alone have power to dissolve Ireland's chains.

The war after the war is in full blast, and it is in very truth the war to end war by removing the tension of unstable social equilibrium in every country which is transmitted to their external relations. Abolish commercial competition, and you will thereby abolish the race of competitive armaments, which is its reflection.

Let us examine the special position of Ireland in view of the present paramount influence of the Sinn Fein Party with regard to the world class-war. The class-war is a reality which cannot be conjured away by denial or asserting, what is true, that it is morally deplorable. Its removal must attend first its recognition by the social mind and then the elimination of the perfectly definite facts which give it being. These facts in the main are three: (i) The private possession of land, factories, and raw material; (ii) the increment to private persons, directly or indirectly of the profits of what is privately owned, in the shape of rent or interest, and (iii) the confused mind and incomplete organisation of the workers, which keeps them in subjection as wage slaves, and

unable to demand and distribute for themselves among themselves their full share of the profits they create.

In most industries to-day the industrial side is sufficiently in the hands of the workers for its actual operation, to enable them, were they sufficiently awake, to assume control and run it themselves. But the industrial is only one aspect. There is also the clerical and administrative. In a country where the clerical and official classes make common cause with the industrial workers, the inauguration of production for general use as opposed to production for profit would be far easier than in a country where as, so far, in England the clerks and officials throw in their lot with the owners and employers. Given, then, that close alliance between Sinn Fein and Irish Labour, which seems obligatory in face of the common enemy, unless each wishes to be defeated in detail, the number of clerks and civil servants in Sinn Fein are a factor making for the mitigation of the class-war by throwing weight enough to win a bloodless victory on to one side. And the confusion inseparable from a purely proletarian revolution with the class of trained administrative ability in the other camp might well be avoided.

This point may be further illustrated by reference to the controversy now raging in England around the Whitley Councils. For the benefit of the uninformed, these Councils are being set up for the meeting of employers and workers round one table to discuss jointly the conditions of employment of the latter. Such questions as hours of labour, appointment of foremen, and even introduction of machinery are covered by their terms of reference, which, however, exclude any admission of the workers' representatives to the counting-house side of the business, such as the obtaining of raw material, the making of contracts, distribution of goods, or allotment of profits. The advanced wing of English Labour is opposed to the whole Whitley scheme, holding, not without reason, that the contact of the workers' representatives with the employers on the Councils would result in the sapping of their class loyalty in exactly the same manner as has already been notorious among Trades Union officials. Men like the Shop Steward leaders argue that to accept the limitation of the Council's reference to conditions of wage-slavery is to compromise the principle of demand for full control. No doubt, the Councils will be accepted by the great body of English workers and the result, which the clear-sighted foresee will ensue, that the workers will thereby assist in riveting the chains of wage-slavery on themselves. Unless the administrative and manual sides of industry make a joint effort for control, the admission of the manual workers to a share in the regulation of their toil is calculated only to secure their consent to their own subjection.

Sinn Fein is rejecting the principle of the Whitley Councils as applied to Anglo-Irish relations. It refuses to sit around the same table at Westminster with the "bosses," and it does well. But does it realise that attached to the centre of English Government is the great part of the economic fabric of Ireland, and that the more complete the severance from England, the more pressing is the need to organise Ireland on an alternative economic base. We predict for Sinn Fein a testing by fire of its leaders and supporters. Those that emerge true to the principle of independence will do so convinced of the need to found that independence with its roots in the soil of Ireland's emancipated and co-ordinated agriculture and industry. The soil is not yet prepared. Ireland cannot be independent while she is still dependent on English and West British capital. But for success, the success that is surely coming, Ireland's independence must rest four-square on the overthrow of Capitalism, native or foreign, co-operative production in agriculture and industry, co-ordinated distribution, and such local and central Government as will facilitate production and distribution at home and regulate exchanges abroad.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Jack White
The Significance of Sinn Fein
Psychological, Political, and Economic.
1919

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100711084712/http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/anarchists/jackwhite/texts/sinnfein.html>

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: This paper was written about Christmas, 1918, shortly after Sinn Fein's triumph in the recent election. The letter of the prophecy that the British Government would not hesitate to suppress by force a rival assembly in Dublin has been falsified by events. The accuracy of several other forecasts, however, is already manifest.)

theanarchistlibrary.org