Workers Solidarity Movement
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July 11, 2002

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in. If you decide you like what we say then please do get in touch and help us in saying (and doing) it. Above all recognise that the answer is not getting 'our' leaders into talks but in taking back control ourselves.

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The Orange Order: an enemy of ALL workers

It is unfortunate, if perhaps somewhat inevitable, that the now annual battles around the 'marching season' fall along religious lines. The Orange parades are being used to test the supposed neutrality of the northern regime and the RUC in particular. The losing side in this dangerous game however is likely to be the working class, Protestant and Catholic, as the confrontations and the sectarian attacks that occur around the Orange marches drive people further into 'their own' communities.

The reality of the Orange Order is that it is a counter-revolutionary institution set up and maintained to target not just Catholics but also 'disloyal' Protestants. It's formation and spread was encouraged by the British state in the years leading up to the 1798 rebellion precisely in order to drive a wedge between ordinary Catholics and Protestants. The 12th of July was picked as the key date to provide an alternative attraction to the marking of Bastille day and in itself to mark the sectarian massacre that led to the formation of the Orange Order.

The Orange Order was born in Armagh in 1795 as part of an armed terror campaign to deny full citizenship rights to Catholics. This was in the context of struggles between landlords and tenants in the area of which the Anglican Archbishop of Armagh said "the worst of this is that it stands to unite Protestant and Papist, and whenever that happens, good-bye to the English interest in Ireland". Specifically the penal laws forbade Catholics from bearing arms, but radical (and mostly Protestant) volunteer companies in the 1780's had been recruiting and arming Catholics with the "the full support of a radical section of Protestant political opinion"[1] .

[1] The Defenders, p18, Deirdre Lindsay, in 1798; 200 years of resonance, Ed. Mary Cullen.

The sectarian attacks that accompany Orange marches today also go right back to its origins. Again in 1795 up to 7,000 Catholics were driven out of Armagh by Orange Order pogroms. But there was one key difference with today, then many expelled Catholic families were sheltered by Presbyterian United Irishmen in Belfast and later Antrim and Down, and the (mostly) Protestant leadership of the United Irishmen sent lawyers to prosecute on behalf of the victims of Orange attacks. They also sent special missions to the area to undermine the Orange Order's influence.

Indeed the Orange Order probably played a key part in ensuring the failure of the 1798 rebellion. At the time General John Knox, the architect of this policy described the Orange Order as "the only barrier we have against the United Irishmen"[2] after the failed rebellion he wrote "the institution of the Orange Order was of infinite use."[3] The survival of the Orange Order since, and in particular the special place it was given in the sectarian make up of the northern state (every single head of the 6 counties has also been a senior member of the Orange Order), reflect its success in this role.

The strategy was simple. In order to prevent Protestant workers identifying with their Catholic neighbours the order offered an anti-Catholic society, led by the wealthy Protestants that offered all Protestants a place in its ranks, and the promise of promotion and privilege. The annual parades were a key part of this strategy, they filled two roles. They allowed the working class Protestant members a day in the sun to mix with their 'betters' and at the same time lord it over their Catholic neighbours.

At the same time they exposed radical Protestant workers to accusations of being 'traitors' for refusing to take part in the events. Much of the imagery of loyalism, the bonfires, the bunting and

[2] The Tree of Liberty, Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760 — 1830, Kevin Whelan, p119.

[3] The Tree of Liberty, Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760 — 1830, Kevin Whelan, p120.

that's about it. Many workers in the South have spent a good part of the last decade fighting the power of the Catholic church, from its influence on the legal system to its covering up of child abusing priests and enslavement of unmarried mothers in the Magdalen laundries.

Apart from that, the recent Dunnes Stores strike demonstrates that the gobshite Southern bosses are every bit as mean as their northern equivalents. It also demonstrates they can be beaten, if workers stand together.

Workers' unity against the bosses is required but the form that unity takes is also vital. The unity must be political as well as economic. The RUC, the border, clerical control of schools and hospitals, and laws restricting divorce, gay sex and access to abortion all need to be opposed.

We cannot rely on a few "good men" to sort out the situation for us. That is the mistake most of the socialist movement made this century and is the reason why we had 'socialist' dictatorships like the USSR and China on the one hand, and 'socialist' sell-outs like the Labour Party or Democratic Left on the other. There is, however, a different current in socialism, based not on good leaders but on the self-organisation of the working class.

This self-organisation is what anarchism is all about. We don't believe the way forward lies in finding the right leader, whether it's Gerry Adams, Tony Blair or Lenin. Instead we see the way forward lying with ordinary people; taking control of our lives into our own hands, coming together and starting to fight back. The role of anarchists is not to assume the leadership of such a process but to argue for self-activity, encourage it and seek to encourage those fighting back to unite in an overall struggle against capitalism and for a new society.

And that's where you come in. Unlike other left papers, we won't end every article by telling you the only way forward is to join the party. What we do say is find out more about anarchism and look at ways of encouraging self-activity in the struggles you are involved

- 1932 Outdoor Relief strike when the unemployed of the Falls and the Shankill rioted in support of each other, and against the police.

Both these were broken by the unionist bosses convincing Protestant workers that it was all a 'Fenian' trick and that their real interests lay in loyalism. Look at the poverty figures for the Shankill road today and you can see who was really tricking who. But the bosses' trick worked and economic unity crumbled, to be replaced by a vicious pogrom and the expulsion of Catholics and left-wing Protestants from the shipyards in 1919 and sectarian rioting in 1933.

For this reason, the idea we can wish the division of the working class in the north away by simply talking about wages and living conditions is a fantasy. More recently there has been unity in support of the nurses' pay claim, against health service cuts and against sectarian intimidation in Housing Executive and Dept. of Social Security offices. All of these instances are heartening. Unfortunately little permanent unity has been built upon these successes because of a failure to confront 'communal politics'.

Protestant workers have to reject loyalism and unionism as ruling class ideologies. They have to see their allies as being workers who happen to be Catholic, north and south, and their enemies as the loyalist bosses and the British state. This is no easy break to make but the big benefit of the ceasefire is that it is now easier then it was a year ago.

No to the bosses Orange or Green

Catholic workers have a similar break to make. The politics of both the SDLP and Sinn Féin are essentially about extending the southern state northwards. This would have the benefit of ending rule by sectarian bigots (although the southern Gardaí are no more keen on the working class then their northern counterparts) but

the painted kerbstones provide an opportunity to demand of every Protestant worker in a community 'which side are you on'.

Right from the start the parades have been accompanied by violence as they attempt to force their way through areas where they are not wanted. The first parades of 1796 saw one fatality, but in 1797 14 were killed during violence at an Orange parade in Stewartstown. In 1813 an Orange parade through one of the first areas of Belfast identified as 'Catholic' saw four more deaths.

The town of Portadown has long been a hot bed of 'contentious' parades, banned marches took place there in 1825 and 1827. In 1835 the Portadown marches claimed their first victim, Hugh Donnelly, a Catholic from Drumcree. Armagh Magistrate, William Hancock, (a Protestant), said:

"For some time past the peaceable inhabitants of the parish of Drumcree have been insulted and outraged by large bodies of Orangemen parading the highways, playing party tunes, firing shots, and using the most opprobrious epithets they could invent … a body of Orangemen marched through the town and proceeded to Drumcree church, passing by the Catholic chapel though it was a considerable distance out of their way."[4]

In the relevant stability after the defeat of 1798 the British and local ruling class felt they no longer needed the Order and, as we have seen, went so far as to ban it and its marches. Its survival during these years shows that the institution cannot simply be viewed as dependent on Britain or local Protestant rulers. It also fed off the historical legacy of sectarianism and annually offered a chance for the 'little man' to feel big. In this sense the psychological attraction of Orangism for poor Protestants is similar to the attraction described by William Reich of poor workers/unemployed for fascism.

[4] The figures for killing and quotes in this section come from the PFC report 'For God and Ulster: an alternative guide to the Loyal Orders' to be found on the internet at www.serve.com

The Orange Order's complex nature is also shown by the events of 1881 when it was possible for the Land league to hold a meeting in the local Orange hall at Loughgall. Micheal Davitt told the crowd that the "landlords of Ireland are all of one religion — their God is mammon and rack-rents, and evictions their only morality, while the toilers of the fields, whether Orangemen, Catholics, Presbyterians or Methodists are the victims".

This danger of class unity saw the ruling class and British conservatives rapidly returning to the Order and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland responded with a manifesto claiming that the Land League was a conspiracy against property rights, Protestantism, civil and religious liberty and the British constitution. When the question was put this way the Orange Order fulfilled its role and went on to provide the scab labour which attempted to harvest Captain Boycott's crops.

From this period on, with the growth of the socialist movement, the Orange Order's warnings became extended to the idea of a conspiracy of "Popery", "anarchy" and "communism". These sort of warnings were repeated whenever periods of social radicalism saw Protestant workers acting in their own interests as it was precisely at these moments that the danger of them linking up with Catholic workers threatened the unity of the Order. In 1932, when the Falls and Shankill rioted together against unemployment, the Order warned "loyal subjects of the King, the vital necessity of standing guard against communism".

Although Catholic workers have been and continue to have a higher chance of being unemployed than Protestant workers for much of the North's history, rates of Protestant unemployment have still been high. This gave the Orange order both a 'carrot and stick' to encourage Protestant workers to join. The Order was a place where workers could meet employers, and formally or informally receive job offers. On the other hand, particularly in rural areas, employers would be aware of who was a member and discriminate in job applications against those who were not.

united across the sectarian divide in the past to fight on economic issues, this will happen again in the future. We need to be in a position when this happens to turn that fight into a fight for an anarchist Ireland.

This article is from *Workers Solidarity* No 54 published in June 1998

Neither Orange nor Green

While welcoming the ceasefire we don't expect the "peace process" to lead to much. Sinn Féin's politics offer little more to Northern workers, as a class, than the politics of the fringe loyalist groups. Both aspire to getting a better deal for the poor and oppressed in their communities but neither are capable of delivering, as they are limited to rhetorical appeals to the workers of the other side to "see sense". Neither can offer a way forward because neither can unite workers across the sectarian divide in a common struggle.

Anarchism, at the moment, is a very much smaller force in Ireland then even the fringe loyalist groups, but it does offer a way forward. We argue for working class self-activity that appeals not to politicians or priests as allies but to workers everywhere, in Ireland, in Britain and internationally. But this unity cannot be based on just 'bread and butter issues'. In the past Catholic and Protestant workers have united in common fights to get more from the bosses. The largest and better known examples of this are

- 1919 Engineering strike when the mostly Protestant workforce of Harland and Wolff elected a strike committee that happened to be mostly Catholic.

First time as tragedy, second time as farce?

It is deeply ironic that the agreement comes 200 years after the great rebellion of 1798. It is claimed that during the rebellion the English Viceroy boasted it would be crushed so brutally that the cause of the United Irishmen would be set back for 200 years. This it now appears was an underestimate. 'Republicans' seem to have given up on the great promise of that rebellion "to substitute the common name of Irishman for Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter".

So why have we arrived at such a dead end? There are two reasons, the first in the absolute failure by the left to promote any alternative vision capable of winning people to the fight for a better society. This is not just an Irish problem but an international one as the left promoted one lame duck dictatorship after another.

Secondly the rules of the game are changing. Any conflict between the ruling class of Southern Ireland and the ruling class of Britain is being buried by their joint need to efficiently manage the European workforce. They both pushed the agreement because the question of which of them manages capital in the six counties, is far less important than the removal of an ongoing instability in the European political system.

In many ways the deal is to their advantage. The costs of having to occasionally police the annual confrontation at Drumcree and elsewhere may well be outweighed by the knowledge that northern workers face major difficulties in uniting against the demands of European capital. Early May saw an 11 day strike by Danish workers for one weeks extra holidays, no doubt our rulers are hoping we'll be too busy fighting about who can march where to ever dream of such a thing.

For anarchists looking at the future the old saying 'if I was going there I wouldn't start from here' rings particularly true. It is all too easy to despair that the tiny numbers of anarchists who are active will be unable to point to an alternative. But here is where we are, so here is where we have to start from. Northern workers have

Understanding the reactionary origins of the Orange Order is central is understanding why the claims that the marches represent 'Protestant culture' is about on a par with claiming a Ku Klux Klan march represents 'white culture'. Indeed the very promotion of a separate 'Protestant' culture can only be seen as deeply reactionary in the context of the 6 counties. The term 'Protestant' culture is never used to include the Protestant republicans of 1798 or 1934, for instance. As such it's real meaning can only be 'anti-Catholic'.

Andrew Flood

Loyalism and the Protestant working class: Time to stop beating the Orange Drum

THERE IS NOTHING in Irish politics about which more rubbish is spoken than the Protestant working class. Now that the loyalists have ceased their murder campaign more attention is being paid to them. Not only are a lot of mainstream politicians unsure what to make of loyalism, when they are not downright scared of it; but many on the 'left' are equally bamboozled. Taking a serious look at reality shows up an upsetting fact: sectarian bigotry is still strongly ingrained. That is why the Orange Order, Apprentice Boys, OUP, DUP, UVF, UDA and all the other loyalist organisations can, between them, claim the allegiance of the vast majority of northern Protestants.

Loyalism is not primarily about loyalty to the British government or to the Queen. It has its own interests. That is why Carson's UVF could threaten rebellion against Britain when Home Rule was discussed. That is why the UDA can talk about breaking the link with Britain and having an independent Ulster.

Long before the partition of Ireland, landlords and industrialists of the north east had been using Orangism as a way to divide the plain people and thereby control them. When the Orange Order was founded in 1795 it was to protect the aristocracy from the revolutionary nationalists of the United Irishmen and to divide working people on religious grounds.

'PROTESTANT PRIVILEGE'

Its function was to fool ordinary Protestants into thinking that they had a common cause with their 'betters'. Its basis was making the 'Croppies' or 'Fenians' (i.e. Catholics) lie down. Initially Protestant privilege had to do with getting the best land. More recently it has been about access to jobs, houses, and a sense of superiority. That this 'privilege' is very minor does not matter a lot. When you have little, the difference between you and the person with even less can assume an unreal importance.

The history of Protestant privilege in the North is not seriously denied by many people anymore. Nor is it seriously denied that this was official policy since the formation of the northern state in 1921. It was never a secret. Unionist prime ministers couldn't stop boasting about it.

"I have always said that I am an Orangeman first, and a politician and a member of this parliament afterwards…all I boast is that we have a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people" (Craigavon); "I recommend those people who are loyalists not to employ Roman Catholics… I want you to realise that you have got your Prime Minister behind you" (Brookeborough). Even the much lauded 'liberal' Terence O'Neill advertised for a "Protestant girl" to clean his house.

TERRORISM

This policy of anti-Catholic bigotry was enforced by terror and murder. Sometimes it was carried out by official bodies (the RUC

in calling for a no vote without presenting any realistic alternative to the 'back to war' brigade.

The parliamentary 'left' however not only accepted the deal, they tried to present it as the best thing since sliced bread. This dishonesty can only be described as incredible. The agreement as outlined in the first paragraph not only accepts but promotes the most reactionary view of the working class on this island possible. In 1798 the United Irishmen asked "Are we forever to stalk like beasts of prey through fields stained with our ancestors' blood?" Today's 'republicans', whether pro or anti-deal both seem to be answering 'Yes'.

The agreement is a consequence of the failure of republicanism and the left to win over any significant section of northern Protestant workers to an anti-partitionist stance. Right now this failure is so complete that this may seem like an impossibly utopian project. But historically, both spontaneously and catalysed by left activists, sections of the Protestant working class in the north have proved open to such a strategy. Most famously when 500 Protestant workers from Belfast joined the Bodenstown Wolfe Tone Commemoration in 1934.

Such a strategy however required one sacrifice the republicans would not make, that was to 'break the connection with capitalism' and fight for a '32 county workers republic'. In truth though after independence far too many republican activists saw the fight as one to extend the clerical state in the south into the north, albeit with them in the driving seat. In any case making a link with working class northern Protestants would have meant breaking the link with the southern ruling class and the Catholic church.

Since partition, despite executions and excommunications by their 'friends', most Republicans have viewed that link as sacred above all others. So in 1934 Bodenstown those Protestant workers were physically driven off the march.

> "At their first meeting, members of the Assembly will register a designation of identity — nationalist, unionist or other"

The 'Other' are very much second class citizens as

> "arrangements to ensure key decisions are taken on a cross-community basis;
>
> (i) either parallel consent, i.e. a majority of those members present and voting, including a majority of the unionist and nationalist designations present and voting;
>
> (ii) or a weighted majority (60%) of members present and voting, including at least 40% of each of the nationalist and unionist designations present and voting".

In other words instead of a unionist veto we now have both a unionist and a nationalist veto. This makes it almost impossible to develop any sort of non-sectarian parliamentary party as its vote simply wouldn't count in vital decisions. Anarchists have little time for parliamentary politics, we are against any division into leaders and led but what the peace agreement has created is a system where even a Labour party is almost impossible.

Is it better than an ongoing and increasingly sectarian war? Yes! But it is a step sidewards. It is for this reason that we refused to vote for or against it, choosing to abstain.

The failure is ours!

It is a damning indictment of all who identify themselves as left-wing (or even liberal) how little opposition there has been to this aspect of the deal. Within 'republicanism' the only opposition was based on the crudest of 'four green fields' nationalism and the resurrection of corpses as holy relics to ward off a 'sell out'. Some socialist organisations actually ended up supporting this nonsense,

and the B Specials), sometimes by 'unofficial' murder gangs such as that led by RUC District Inspector Nixon in the 1920s. Today the main players are the Royal Irish Regiment (formerly the UDR), along with the UDA, UVF and Red Hand Commando.

In 1924 Prime Minister Craig introduced legislation to "indemnify all officers of the Crown against all actions or legal proceedings... (in relation to) any act, matter or thing done during the course of the present Troubles, if done in good faith, and done, or purported to be done in the execution of their duty or for the defence of Northern Ireland". In 1969 Terence O'Neill granted an amnesty to the loyalist thugs (including off-duty RUC and B Specials) who attacked civil rights marchers at Burntollet Bridge. Today very few RUC or RIR members, no matter how bloody their deeds, ever see the inside of a prison cell.

This is now accepted as an established fact by practically everyone. What many do not want to accept is that Protestant privilege is still a reality in the North. Yet the official British government figures show that Catholic males are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. A study released last October by Professor Bob Rowthorn of Cambridge University found that 33% of Catholics aged 25 to 55 — the important wage earning years — are unemployed compared to 15% of Protestants. In December it was revealed that 60% of the long term unemployed were Catholics. While there is a very real increase in poverty among Protestants, it is still true that Catholics get an even worse deal.

Thus when loyalist workers talk about holding on to what they have, there are talking about something concrete. It is not merely about 'identity' or 'culture'. And where they feel they have lost something over the last twenty five years (like direct unionist control over the RUC and unrestricted power in local councils to allocate jobs and houses to 'loyal Protestants'), they want it back.

LOYALIST VALUES

So let us face facts. Orange sectarianism is not without a material base, and it is not some sort of frightened reaction to militant republicanism. Unless we understand the basis for sectarianism we will not be able to uproot it.

When Protestant workers accept loyalist values they are joining an alliance with their bosses. They are saying that the religion they share with their employers is more important than the status of worker they share with men and women of another religion. The Orange Order has been the biggest body within which this alliance has been institutionalised.

This gives workers a sense of importance, a feeling that they are part of the 'superior' group in society. It also gives them a place near the front of the queue for whatever jobs may be going. It gives the rich a sense of security that the workers will be marching alongside them rather than against them.

Orange sectarianism has always played this role. It ties workers to the rich, and to the interests of the rich. At the same time it cuts off the possibility of those same workers linking up their Catholic counterparts. Again and again episodes of working class militancy were destroyed by appeals from Orange bosses to Orange workers to abandon the class conflict and 'defend Ulster'.

UNITY IN STRUGGLE

These episodes of working class unity did not last long, but they did happen. They showed it is possible. They did not happen because of well meaning platitudes from clergy or liberals. They happened in the course of working class struggle.

The only times when the sectarian barriers were pushed aside, when large numbers of working class Protestants turned away from Orangism, was when they were involved in struggle against 'their' bosses and 'their' government. When they fight to better

Mary and Nora Griffin. Billy Boyd came from York Street. Other members of the groups included Maurice Watters, Jack White and Ben Murray".

From *Workers Solidarity* No43, 1994

The huge vote, North and South, in favour of the 'Good Friday Agreement' shows that the vast majority do not want a return to pre-ceasefire violence. Can this agreement get to the root of the sectarian problem and deal with the hatreds, fears and suspicions that have bedevilled our country? Andrew Flood looks at the prospects.

Peace deal offers sectarian war or sectarian peace

The agreement represents a new consensus for Ireland, that the island is populated by two tribes of irrational savages who must forever be monitored lest one side gain advantage over the other. Under the deal the wisest representatives of these tribes, supervised by the British and US governments, will gather on a regular basis to fight for the scraps that are provided.

The agreement offers nothing except a sectarian division of the spoils. From here on politics in the six counties is officially divided into Unionist, Nationalist and Other. In regard to the assembly the agreement states

from Dublin to Belfast, but as they reached the border the RUC stopped them and turned most of them back. But some did manage to reach Belfast and took part in the march.

"The main speakers that night were Tommy Greehan, Davey Scarborough, Jimmy Koter, Betty Sinclair, Sean Murray and Arthur Griffin. Thomas Mann came over from England to speak at the funerals of the two Falls men. He was arrested and deported to Clogher Valley, before returning to his home. Other well known speakers I remember of that time were Bob Stewart from Dundee, Willie Gallacher and Charlotte Despard.

"Two weeks after that march I lost my job. I was a farm labourer employed by David McAnse. He was the father of Anne Dickinson, who until recently was a Unionist politician in East Belfast.

"There were RWGs in different parts of the city. In East Belfast were Bob Ellison, Bob Stewart, Eddie and Sadie Menzies, Jimmy Woods, James Connolly (no relation!), Davey Greenlaw, Jimmy McKenzie, Joe Lather, Jimmy Spence, Jimmy Kernoghan, John Lavery, Billy Bishop, Billy Tomlinson and his brother Joe, Billy Somerset Snr., and Lofty Johnson.

"The Falls Road group members were Johnny McWilliams, Jimmy Quinn, Tom Picken, Johnny Campell and Jimmy Hughes. Jimmy McKurk was a very militant worker in the ODR strike from the Falls but wasn't in the group.

"Group members from the Shankill were Norman Taggart and his brother Bob, Bob McVicker and his brother Sam, Billy Johnson, John Sinclair, Aggie Young and Martha Burch. From the Donegal Road were John,

things for themselves and their families they are forced to break from their bosses and make common cause with other workers.

However when they fight only to better themselves as Protestants, they must turn their backs on other workers and make common cause with their bosses.

There have always been many Protestant workers who have not been fooled by sectarian hatemongering into turning against Catholics. These are the ones who have fought hard, and often at great risk, against the bigots on their jobs and in their unions. However they are in the minority.

GREEN NONSENSE

Because of this most republicans write off Protestants as indefinitely stuck in a swamp of bigotry and hatred. This is not only irrational, it also reinforces backward looking Green nationalism. It should be obvious, especially to socialists and trade unionists, that working class people have more in common than they do separating them.

Anyone seriously interested in rooting out sectarian hatred and building working class unity must look at the times when people came together and the reasons their unity was not sustained.

In 1907 Protestant and Catholic dockers and carters (transport workers) fought together in a great strike which closed down much of Belfast. The mood this struggle generated even led to the police coming out on strike. The leading organiser was Jim Larkin, a man who was not exactly a hero to loyalism!

In 1919 40,000 engineering workers from jobs like the Harland & Wolff, Shorts and Mackies struck for a 48-hour week. While most of the strikers were Protestant, the majority on the strike committee were Catholic. Not only was the strike solid but the strikers fought together against British soldiers brought in to scab.

FALLS & SHANKILL FIGHT TOGETHER

In 1932 thousands of unemployed fought together for better conditions on the 'outdoor relief' projects. The unemployed of the Falls and the Shankill rioted together against the police.

In 1944 25,000 shipyard workers became 'disloyal' when they defied the wartime anti-strike laws and struck for higher pay.

In 1982 thousands of Catholic and Protestant nurses, ambulance drivers, cleaners, porters and other health workers stood beside each other on picket lines against cutbacks and for a pay rise.

In almost every year since the early 1980s Catholic and Protestant struck together in the Health Boards, the DSS, the Housing Executive and other jobs against sectarian murder threats.

As well as these well-known incidents there have been hundreds of other smaller examples, all of which show the same thing — that Protestant workers have broken, at least temporarily, from Orange bigotry and linked up with Catholic workers to achieve better conditions for both.

SNUFFING OUT SECTARIANISM

There is no denying that these episodes have been brief. But they demonstrate that unity is possible. Struggles against the bosses are the starting point from which anarchists work to snuff out the fires of sectarian hatred. Only class politics have ever successfully provided an alternative to loyalism.

These episodes have been brief because unity on 'bread & butter' issues has never extended into unity on broader political issues. Whenever the 'national question' was raised workers began to divide on religious lines. And that is why the bosses always raised it.

First it was 'Home Rule' and then 'the border'. Each time Protestant workers took fright and retreated back into loyalism. Republicanism contributed to this by insisting that there must be a united

"We had an improvised band to lead us. We borrowed three drums from St Malachy's pipe band in the Markets. But they were destroyed that night. I remember Tommy Hill being there. He was a tram driver, and was known as Red Tommy because he always wore a red tie. He wasn't in the RWG, but was an independent from the Shankill Road. He spoke at all the meetings.

"October, fifty years ago, was a wonderful event in the workers' struggle for better conditions. On that occasion there was a fight against the Poor Law Guardians of Belfast, who were controlled by the Unionist Party. The Guardians had imposed extremely harsh conditions on unemployed workers.

"Whenever the benefit of an unemployed person ran out due to not having enough stamps, they had to do task work three days a week. They got paid 16/- a week, not in cash but in the form of a chit. This was given to the grocer who gave you groceries for that amount.

"The workers, of course, took exception to this form of payment and thousands of Outdoor Relief workers took to the street to protest against it. Some of these protests ended up in clashes with the police and in a series of riots, with a large number of people being arrested. The worst riot occurred on the Falls Road where two protesters were shot dead. They were Samuel Baxter and John Keenan.

"The Outdoor Relief workers replied with a massive protest to Queens Square, organised by the Revolutionary Workers Groups. There were about 40,000 workers in Queens Square that night on 11th October 1932. They came from all parts of Belfast, and from Derry and Coleraine. Four hundred workers set out to walk

"I remember the march up the Newtownards Road. It was organised by the Revolutionary Workers Group. The agitation was against the 10% cut in welfare benefits the government imposed. The bru was 17/- but they brought it down to 15/-. It was the same year as the Invergordon mutiny in Scotland when the sailors struck against a reduction in their wage.

"There were about 1,500 of us on the march, with a red flag, and we were to have a meeting at Templemore Avenue. Bob Stewart from Scotland was to speak but there was a mob of about 40 to greet us. They went under the name of the Ulster Protestant League and were out to get him as he was well known. They had lambeg drums, deacon poles (with a spear at the end), and a union jack.

"John Crumlin, a notorious bigot from the shipyards (during the early '20s he stirred up sectarian hatred against the Catholics, which drove many of them out) carried the Union jack. He was one of the 'three Cs' — Carson, Crumlin and Connor, who ten years earlier had been responsible for stirring up sectarian hatred in the shipyards and chasing Catholics out. Crumlin, in particular, made the most maledictory speeches then.

"There were about fifty police there. But they weren't there to protect us. It was a sham defence. They let the mob through and then joined in. There was a lot of fighting and it ended with nine arrests. Jack White had his neck cut by one of the deacon poles, not too seriously. He was fined £10 and bound over to keep the peace. So was Harold Davidson, a student from Malone. But the rest, who had no connections, got about three months each.

Ireland before class politics could take the stage. Workers unity on day-to-day issues holds no special importance for them. They either can't see, or won't see, that joining the Ireland of DeValera, Cosgrave or Reynolds is not going to fire the average Protestant with enthusiasm!

The trade unions are the only mass organisation of workers that spans the sectarian divide, that has not been broken down on religious lines. However the leadership of the unions has argued hard that to introduce the political issues of imperialism, partition and repression can not be allowed as it will divide the movement. This has meant that when divisions came to the fore these same leaders have had no answers, no way to combat the divisiveness that has been part and parcel of the six county state since its inception.

NOTHING TO SAY

Throughout the troubles the ICTU Northern Ireland Committee has been opposed to anyone who has called for a struggle against the sectarian state. They say that is 'divisive'. The result has been that the official trade union movement has nothing to say when the likes of Paisley and company demand support for the status quo.

It is no surprise that workers who stood shoulder to shoulder a while ago are now viewing each other as enemies. They are not hearing anything that would suggest a different way of seeing things. Almost everyone tells them that their trade union unity has no political implications.

The only way to win Protestant workers away from the bigoted all-class alliance of loyalism is to build a movement which has its base in day-to-day struggles and which also explains why it is in the interest of all working class people to destroy the six county state. Alongside a fight against the 26 county state, a new Ireland-a Workers Republic — becomes a realistic possibility. Anything less adds to the painful division into Orange and Green.

A movement which fights only on economic issues can gather support from significant numbers of Protestants but when it comes into conflict with the Northern state will rip itself asunder and disappear. We need only look at how the Northern Ireland Labour Party, which was a major force in the 1960s, completely vanished in the 1970s when it could not cope with the realities of the civil rights campaign and the later troubles.

AN ANARCHIST ANSWER

On the other hand a movement which opposes the sectarian state but does not base itself on the day-to-day needs of working class people will find it impossible to break out of the confines of the Catholic community. It will fail to make any contact with Protestants, even when they are fighting their own bosses. This has always been the case with republicanism.

Loyalism bases itself on handing out a few marginal privileges to Protestant workers. It is about who suffers slightly less poverty. All talk of a more 'just' redistribution of poverty must be rejected. Anarchists have no desire to take from someone who has little in order to give to someone else who has even less. We won't be satisfied with anything less than the elimination of poverty.

Our goal is a socialist Ireland, where the freedom of the individual is respected and where the working class hold direct and complete control through their own councils. In the struggle for this loyalist workers can be won away from their bosses, and only then will the cycle of sectarianism be finally broken.

Joe King

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their workplace. But there is no denying that radical ideas that are well in advance of today's republicans were on the agenda of many in 1798.

The central message of 1798 was not Irish unity for its own sake, indeed the strongest opponents of the British parliament had been the Irish ascendancy, terrified that direct rule might result in Catholic emancipation. Unity offered to remove the sectarian barriers that enabled a tiny ascendancy class to rule over millions without granting even a thimble full of democratic rights. The struggle has progressed since as many of these rights have been won, but in terms of creating an anarchist society the words of James Hope, the most proletarian of the 1798 leaders still apply

> "Och, Paddies, my hearties, have done wid your parties. Let men of all creeds and profissions agree. If Orange and Green min, no longer were seen, min. Och, naboclis, how easy ould Ireland we'd free."

When the Falls and the Shankill fought together

THIS YEAR is the 60th anniversary of the Outdoor Relief strike in Belfast, which saw unemployed Catholics and Protestants fighting alongside each other. In 1982 one of the few survivors from the strike, William Burrows, talked to Outta Control, a local anarchist paper in Belfast. Twelve years later we are pleased to help uncover a small bit of anti-sectarian working class history be reprinting William's recollections. He talked firstly of a march up the Newtownards Road, and secondly described the rally of 40,000 at Queens Square.

when the southern and northern states adopted opposed confessional definitions of themselves. One legacy of that failure is that in 1998 we not only live on a divided island but that the vast majority of our hospitals and schools are either Catholic or Protestant.

The United Irishmen's core project, to replace the name of Irishman for the labels of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter was not an abstract nationalist one. It came from a concrete analysis that unless this was done then no progress could be made because a people divided were easily ruled. Here lies the greatest gulf with 'republicans' today who reverse this process and imagine that such unity can only be the outcome rather than the cause of progress.

The rebellion of the United Irishmen was not a rebellion for four abstract green fields, free of John Bull. It was inspired by the new ideas of equality, fraternity and liberty coming out of the French revolution. Separatism became a necessary step once it was realised that fulfilling these ideas required the ending of British rule. For many it also represented a rebellion against the ownership of land by a few, and for some a move towards an equality of property.

Those leaders who planned the rising were part of a revolutionary wave sweeping the western world, they were internationalists and indeed an agreement for distinct republics was drawn up with the United Scotsmen and the United Englishmen.[58] They corresponded with similar societies in Paris and London. Some, like Thomas Russell, were also active anti-slavery campaigners. As Connolly puts it "these men aimed at nothing less than a social and political revolution such as had been accomplished in France, or even greater".[59]

None of this is to claim that socialism was on the agenda in 1798. Common ownership of the means of production would not become a logical solution for some years yet, when large numbers of people started to work in situations where they could not simply divide up

[58] A history of the Irish Working Class, ibid, p72

[59] Labour and Irish History, ibid, Chap VII

Marching to nowhere: Stirring Up Sectarian Hatred

IT IS A great tragedy that once again this July the working class population of Belfast's Lower Ormeau will be mobilising to try and stop the Orange Order from marching down their road. A tragedy because the Order should never get that far, it should be stopped by the working class population of the Upper Ormeau!

Although Orange marches have been opposed since they began, the recent wave of nationalist opposition in Belfast dates from events in February 1992. On the Lower Ormeau Road in Belfast five Catholics were murdered in a bookies shop by the UDA. That July, some Orangemen while marching past the site of the gave five-fingered salutes. The Portadown march through the Garvaghy Road had provoked serious confrontations in 1972, 1975 and 1981.

Much noise has come from loyalist quarters about the central involvement of current and ex-Sinn Féin members in the residents' committees that oppose the march. While it is undoubtably true that the confrontations help Sinn Féin push its agenda of 'parity of esteem' and provide a mechanism for highlighting the problems with the RUC, there is also little doubt that the campaigns against the parades are genuinely popular. It is up to the residents to choose who will act as their spokespersons in talks with the Orange Order.

However for anarchists, while we should oppose the Orange Orders parades where ever local people reject them (and our ideal would be for 'Protestant areas' to also oppose them), there are real problems with the way these campaigns are proceeding.

They have been caught up with Sinn Fein's need to put the RUC to the test and have tended to move towards a position of lobbying the British state to ban Orange marches (via the Parades Commission) and use its military to enforce these bans. Thus the Drumcree confrontation of 1998 and the massive show of military force de-

ployed by the British became a shop front for the role of the British state as an 'honest broker' between two troublesome children.

Far from exposing the role of the British state in Ireland and thus why it should withdraw, this appears to demonstrate the importance that it stays to 'keep the peace'. This is the problem with putting Britain's commitment to 'parity of esteem' to the test, it is all too easy a test for the British state to pass!

Anarchists cannot call for state bans on marches in any guise. Bitter experience has shown that when the state is given a weapon to ban reactionary marches it will quite happily use this weapon against progressives ones too. Nowhere should this be clearer than in the six counties, the current round of conflicts saw its origins in the banning and re-routing of Civil Rights marches in 1968.

The central problem however is that the residents' groups are fighting on the sectarian terrain chosen by the Orange Order. With its membership declining and its influence on the state under threat, the Order needs an 'anti-Protestant' opposition to justify its continued existence.

The residents' groups are allowing themselves to be painted into this corner because their opposition is almost completely based around the anti- Catholic nature of the Orange Order. This makes it all too easy for the Orange Order to tell Protestant workers that the opposition is really 'anti-Protestant' in nature. It also leaves unchallenged sectarians within the nationalist areas who are active in or around these groups.

As anarchists we could just wish this issue would go away and so refuse to deal with its complexity. However to do this would also be to make ourselves irrelevant for the two to three months that the 'marching season' dominates the northern political agenda.

In general we should support the attempts to physically prevent the Orange Order marching through residential areas where they are not welcome. We should not involve ourselves in lobbying the British or Irish states, either directly or indirectly (through the Pa-

where those responsible for sectarian murders of Protestants were not treated as seriously by the republican movement as informers or even those judged guilty of 'anti-social' crime.

However, the south has started to emerge from under the long dark shadow of Catholic nationalism, in the urban centres at least. De Valera's comely maids at the Crossroads and the threat of the Bishop's crosier have faded into a distant and bizarre past.

However in the north, the ideology of a 'Protestant state for a Protestant people' is still strong. Particularly in recent years, this has seen the political decision of northern loyalists to start referring to themselves as British or 'Ulster-Scots'. This is a quite remarkable robbing of even the history of loyalism, and would have been an insult to even the Orangemen of 1798, one of whom James Claudius Beresford declared he was "Proud of the name of an Irishman, I hope never to exchange it for that of a colonist".[56]

A couple of years after the rising, Britain succeeded in forcing the Irish Parliament to pass an 'Act of Union' which effectively dissolved that parliament and replaced it with direct rule from Westminster. It is ironic that 36 Orange Lodges in Co. Armagh and 13 in Co. Fermanagh declared against this Act of Union. Lodge No. 500 declared it would "support the independence of Ireland and the constitution of 1782" and "declare as Orangemen, as Freeholders, as Irishmen that we consider the extinction of our separate legislature as the extinction of the Irish Nation".[57]

What was the nation fought for in 1798?

The rewriting of the history of 1798 by loyalists and nationalists alike has a common purpose, which is to define being 'Irish' as containing a requirement to being a Catholic. The greatest defeat of 1798 is the success of this project, in particular after partition

[56] Revolt in North, ibid, p243
[57] Ibid, p243

ture, in which the victims head was set on fire.[55] Most significantly this massacre happened when the rebel army had withdrawn from the town and stopped when rebel forces returned.

It is an unfortunate feature of some republican and left histories of 1798 that the sectarian nature of the Wexford massacres is either avoided or minimised. To northern Protestant workers today this merely appears to confirm an impression that this is the secret agenda of the republican movement. The stories — both true and false — of sectarian massacres in Wexford that were circulated in the North before and during the rising must have undermined the unity of the United Irishmen. Although the Wexford leadership did act to limit sectarianism, in hindsight it is obvious that the United Irishmen were complacent about sectarianism amongst the Defenders and in Wexford more could and should have been done. In particular the final and most blatantly sectarian massacre, at Wexford bridge, could probably have been avoided if the Dixons, the couple at the centre of it, had been silenced. They had spent the period of the rebellion in Wexford trying to whip up a pogrom.

1798 and Irish nationalism

The debate around nation is in itself something that divides the Irish left. In particular after the partition of Ireland in 1922, there has been a real and somewhat successful effort to divide people into two nations. One consists of all the people in the south along with northern Catholics. Catholicism is a central part of this definition, with the Catholic Church being given an informal veto for many decades over state policy in the south. To a large extent this definition is tacitly accepted by many parts of the Republican movement today. Francie Molloy's 1996 election campaign posters — based on there being 20,000 more nationalists (i.e. Catholics) than Protestants in Mid-Ulster — is a case in point. This has led to a situation

[55] Ibid, 1955, p149

rades Commission), to ban marches. We should not demand that the RUC or British army act to enforce whatever bans may exist.

Politically our role around such campaigns should be to challenge the exclusive focus on the Orange Order as an anti-Catholic body. We should highlight its role as a body that is anti-left, against workers' unity and responsible for testing/ disciplining radical Protestant workers. This would serve two purposes, firstly it would undermine the tendency towards mirror image sectarianism within nationalist areas. More importantly, it would open the door towards 'cross-community' opposition to the Orange parades.

This final point will seem hopelessly utopian to many. However until significant numbers of Protestant workers begin to openly reject the Orange Order it will continue to succeed in its primary objective, as a counter revolutionary body. It is probably the case already that an overwhelming majority of southern Protestants oppose the Orange Order, and even in the six counties many radical and even liberal Protestants are probably quietly opposed to the Order.

Right now however there is no opening for them to express this opposition. In the ideal situation we could hope for a broad organisation 'of all religions and none' committed to physically defending areas against Orange parades. Creating that ideal situation starts now with the struggle to win hearts and minds to anti- sectarian working class politics.

Joe Black

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Loyalist Myths: King Billy Revisited

a talk by Gregor Kerr at WSM Open Meeting 7/7/97

> **It is often said that history is written by the victors. It is probably more true to say however that history is written by the rulers or by those with ambition to rule. In this talk I want to look at the events of a period of Irish history which has had a profound effect on the events of the three centuries since and which is the source of many of the sectarian myths which people — especially those in the Six Counties — are still suffering the consequences of. Over three hundred years ago two contenders for the English throne fought their way around Ireland. Nationalist historians extol the virtues of the "Patriotic" Irish forces and their French allies which fought with King James II in defence of Catholicism and Ireland. Unionist politicians and historians on the other hand praise the memory of King William of Orange and his great victory at the Battle of the Boyne in defence of "Civil and Religious Liberty". The truth however is vastly different.**

The Orange Parades on and around the twelfth of July have long been a bone of serious contention and indeed a source of sectarian conflict in the Six Counties. Members of the Orange Order demand their unalienable right to march the Queen's highway, as their forefathers before them have done, in commemoration of the victory of King William of Orange at the battle of the Boyne — a victory (as the Orangemen see it) for religious and civil liberty. Nationalists, on the other hand, see the Orange Parades as nothing more than a coat-trailing exercise designed to keep the Catholic population in

massacres. On 7th June, Edward Lough, commander of the Vinegar Hill camp, issued a proclamation "this is not a war for religion but for liberty".[51] Vinegar Hill was the site of many individual executions over the 23 days the rebel camp existed there. Between 300 and 400 were executed, most were Protestant although Luke Byrne, one of the organisers of the executions, is quoted as saying "If anyone can vouch for any of the prisoners not being Orangemen, I have no objection they should be discharged" and indeed all captured Quakers were released.[52] In general, throughout Wexford Quakers who were Protestant but not associated with loyalism were well treated by the rebels, but did suffer at the hands of the loyalists.

A proclamation from Wexford on 9th June called to "protect the persons and properties of those of all religious persuasions who have not oppressed us"[53] and on 14th June the United Irishmen oath was introduced to the Wexford army. None of this is to deny that there were sectarian tensions and indeed sectarian elements to the massacres, perhaps most openly after the rebel army had abandoned Wexford. Thomas Dixon and his wife then brought 70 men into the town during the night "from the northern side of the Slaney" and plied them with whiskey. The following day a massacre started at 14:00 and lasted over five hours. Up to 97 were murdered.

However, even here, not all the 260 prisoners from whom those massacred were selected could be described as innocent victims. One of those killed (Turner) was seen burning cabins in Oulard shortly before the battle there.[54] Another prisoner who survived was Lord Kingsborough, commander of the hated North Cork Militia and popularly regarded as having introduced the pitch cap tor-

[51] Ibid, p126
[52] Ibid, p77
[53] Ibid, 1955, p126
[54] Ibid, 1955, p62

were also a feature of the rebellion in the north, where no sectarian motive can so easily be attached. A rebel unit near Saintfield (in the north), led by James Breeze, attacked and set fire to the home of Hugh McKee, a well known loyalist and informer, burning him, his wife, five sons, three daughters and housemaid to death.[48]

Loyalist historians are also guilty of ignoring or minimising the causes of most of the massacres, the far larger massacres by British army and loyalist forces of civilians, rebel prisoners and wounded. The greatest of these was the massacres during and after the battle of New Ross where even the Loyalist historian Rev. James Gordon admits "I have reason to think more men than fell in battle were slain in cold blood"[49] . The scale of this massacre can only be guessed at, but after the battle 3, 400 rebels were buried, 62 cart loads of rebel bodies were thrown in the river and many others (particularly wounded) were burned in the houses of the town. According to many accounts the screams of wounded rebels being deliberately burned alive may have played a significant part in the murder of 100 loyalist civilian prisoners at nearby Scullabogue on the morning of the battle.

At Scullabogue around 100 were murdered, 74 were burned alive in a barn, (nine of whom were women and 8 of whom were Catholic) and 21 men were killed on the front lawn. A survivor, Frizel stated that the cause was the rumour that the military were murdering prisoners at New Ross.[50] At least three Protestants were amongst the rebels who carried out these killings. The presence of Protestants amongst the murderers and Catholics among the victims gives the lie to the claim that this was a simple sectarian massacre.

The leadership of the rebellion, both United Irishmen and the Catholic priests, tried to defuse the sectarian tension and prevent

[48] APRN, 11 May 1998
[49] The Wexford Rising in 1798, ibid, p116
[50] Ibid, p129

their place and to pound forward the message that Northern Ireland is an Orange state and that nationalists are and will always remain second class citizens in that state.

It is interesting in this context to look back at the events of just over 300 years ago and to analyse exactly what was involved in the war between William of Orange (King Billy as he is popularly known) and James II of England. This war — popular mythology would have us believe — was a struggle to defend the Protestant religion against the Roman Catholic Church. In reality, however, the Williamite War — in Ireland — was effectively a war between two factions for mastery over the Irish people. And far from being a war to defend Protestantism against the Catholic Church, William of Orange counted among his allies none other than the Pope of Rome — the head of the Roman Catholic Church!! The Pope and King Billy were in fact political buddies engaged in a bitter European power struggle in which Ireland's people — both Catholic and Protestant — were mere sacrificial pawns.

England — and even more so Ireland — were for William of Orange (the ruler of Holland) simply useful tools in his campaign to free Holland from French domination. James II of England had fled to France and to the protection of Louis XIV following an unsuccessful attempt to give all chief state offices in England to Catholic aristocrats. An alliance composed of wealthy landowners and merchants and the Church of England — alarmed by James' actions — invited his son-in-law, the ruler of Holland — William of Orange — to take over!

On November 5th 1688, William landed in England and James found himself deserted by his army, navy, court functionaries, the Law, the Church, the City and even his own family. Fearing for his life, he fled to France and the safety of the Court of Louis XIV. William and his wife Mary were installed as joint monarchs of England after they had agreed a Bill of Rights and an Act of Settlement (which limited the royal succession exclusively to Protestants, even marriage to a Catholic being a disqualification).

In order to understand the effects of all this on Ireland, we must first of all understand what was going on in Europe at the time. We must ask why did William, a Dutchman, come to England, and why did James seek political asylum in France? Louis XIV, autocrat of France and supreme representative of feudalism in Europe, was busily engaged at the time in spreading French dominance in the western world. In the struggle to achieve control Louis required allies, and to upset the balance of power he needed England on his side. James' flight to France was thus mutually beneficial for both the French monarch and the deposed English monarch. James saw his alliance with Louis as a means whereby he could re-establish his dominance at home whereas Louis saw the potential of a re-installed James in terms of his own efforts to dominate Europe.

William of Orange, on the other hand, was fighting for the independence of Holland against Louis and as such was very interested in having England on his side. Thus William's view of the throne of England was its usefulness in defending the national independence of Holland.

It is because William — a Protestant — came to England at the invitation of the Whigs to help them defeat James — a Catholic — that the Williamite war has since been described as a struggle to defend the Protestant religion against the Roman Catholic Church. However the historical realities of the alliances formed in Europe at the time explode this Orange-Unionist-Protestant myth. In fact Catholic Spain was one of William's main allies in the fight against the spread of French dominance. And — wait for it — the Pope — as temporal monarch of Italy — was a fervent supporter of William's claim to the English throne and a military ally in the fight against Louis and France. When William and his army arrived on English soil, he brought with him a Papal blessing and a banner proclaiming the support of Italy and the Pope!!

The maintenance of Protestant England's independence thus coincided with William's interests which in turn coincided with the interest of Catholic Spain and the Pope himself. For Ireland the

for the outbreak … it can only be said that cruelty and oppression produced a yet more savage revenge".[46]

When faced with a Protestant Landlord class mobilising a mainly Protestant local army to torture them and burn their chapels, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Catholics were inclined to identify Protestants as a whole as the problem. The United Irishmen organisation in the area before the rising was too small to make much progress in overcoming this feeling, and in fact one of their tactics added to the sectarian tension. There were Orange Lodges in Wexford and Wicklow. As elsewhere, there is evidence that the United Irishmen deliberately spread rumours of an Orange plot to massacre Catholics. The intention was that the Catholics would join the rebellion in greater numbers, but such rumours inevitably heightened distrust of all Protestants.

The Wexford massacres

Throughout the Wexford rising, sectarian tensions were never far from erupting. This was expressed throughout the rising as a pressure on Protestants to convert to Catholicism, particularly in Wexford town where "Among the insurgent rank and file … heresy hunting became widespread … Protestants found it prudent to attend mass as the only means of saving their lives."[47] When the rebels carried out massacres they often had strong sectarian undertones. Loyalist historians and even Pakenham, the most widely read historian of the rising, are guilty of distorting the nature of these massacres by claiming only Protestants were executed.

The reality of the Wexford massacres was that the victims tended to be landlords, or the actual agents of British rule like magistrates and those related to them or in service to them. Anyone suspected of being an Orangeman was also liable to be executed. Massacres

[46] Col. Hugh Pearse in 'Memoir of the life and service of Viscount Lake' (1744 — 1808) p95 quoted in The Wexford Rising in 1798, ibid, p12

[47] The Wexford Rising in 1798, ibid, p 18

June "to my Protestant soldiers I feel much in dept for their gallant behaviour in the field". For the reasons discussed below, the Wexford rising was seriously mired by sectarianism, but right to the end there were Protestants among the rebels. It is still remembered around Carlow that after the battle Father John Murphy was hidden by a Protestant farmer, only to be betrayed by a Catholic the next day.

It is true that in the north there were sectarian tensions present, a Catholic United Irish officer urged a column of Presbyterians to "avenge the Battle of the Boyne"[44] just before the battle of Antrim! Also in the north, at Ballynahinch, the Defenders (who would have been overwhelmingly Catholic) fought as a distinct unit. However the figures show that thousands of Catholics and Protestants turned out and fought side by side in a series of battles, despite the obvious hopelessness of the situation.

Protestants in Wicklow and Wexford

There were stronger sectarian elements in the Wexford rising. To understand where these came from, we need to look at events immediately before the rising. About 25% of the population was Protestant, these included a few recently arrived colonies that must have displaced earlier Catholic tenants and thus caused sectarian tensions.

The high percentage of Protestants in Wexford also made it possible to construct a Militia and later Yeomanry that was extremely sectarian in composition, in the words of Dickson in Wexford "these Yeoman were almost entirely a Protestant force".[45] This Yeomanry was responsible in part for the savage repression that preceded the rising and the initial house and chapel burning during it. Col. Hugh Pearse observed "in Wexford at least, the misconduct of the Militia and Yeomanry … was largely to blame

[44] When Catholics and Protestants fought on opposite side

[45] The Wexford Rising in 1798, ibid, p13

story was somewhat different. Whoever won the power struggle between William and James the mass of Irish people stood to lose. The events in Ireland during James' attempts to win back the English monarchy proved that neither William and his allies, including the Pope, or James and his ally Louis XIV were in the slightest bit interested in the welfare of the Irish people.

In Ireland the accession of the Catholic James II to the throne of England had excited great interest among the Catholic landlord class. This loyalty to James was purely economic in base with many of them hoping that the Cromwellian settlements would be revoked enabling them to return to ownership of lands which they, or their ancestors had owned in pre-Cromwell times (having, of course, robbed them from Irish people in a previous settlement). Over two-thirds of Ireland's good arable land was at the time owned by less than one-sixth of the total population, the land-owning minority being almost completely members of the Protestant landlord class. Thus the Catholic landlord class welcomed James, the Protestant landowners feared him and for the mass of Irish people whoever won nothing was likely to change.

In Ireland the struggle known as the Williamite Wars was effectively a fight between two factions of landlordism to decide which of them should have the right to exploit the Irish people. As James Connolly was to write in "Labour in Irish History" in 1910

> "Éall the political struggles of the period were built upon the material interests of one set of usurpers who wished to retain, and another who wished to obtain, the mastery of those landsÉ"

In March 1689, James II landed at Kinsale in Co. Cork with a small army comprised of French and Irish troops to launch his bid to win back the English crown. James had in fact little or no interest in Ireland but hoped to use it as a landing post to get to Scotland. On 7th May James called together a parliament to meet in Dublin —

a parliament which, because it declared that the English parliament was incompetent to pass laws for Ireland, was to become known as the "Patriot Parliament".

The extent of the parliament's "patriotism" soon became clear however. The problems of the Irish people as a whole were ignored completely as this parliament quickly set about the task of attempting to secure ownership of the lands of Ireland for the landlords assembled in parliament and to prevent further displacement by other adventurers from England. The landlord class who controlled the parliament used the occasion to carve up Ireland for themselves, ignoring the mass of people and leaving them landless. To quote Connolly again:

> "The so-called Patriot Parliament was in reality, like every other that sat in Dublin, merely a collection of land thieves and their lackeys; their patriotism consisted in an effort to retain for themselves the spoils of the native peasantry; the English influence against which they protested was the influence of their fellow thieves in England hungry for a share of the spoilÉ"

William of Orange sent his first battalion of troops to Ireland on August 13th 1689 and William himself arrived over on 14th June 1690. With an army of 36,000 men he left Belfast on the march to Dublin. Despite the myth, the actual Battle of the Boyne was of little significance as it did not end the war. Indeed we should also remember that, despite the fact that he was supposedly fighting for England and Protestantism, the English parliament was extremely reluctant to give William the army he needed to conquer Ireland saying that he had plenty of Dutchmen anyway. So when William did cross the Boyne on July 1st 1690, he had an army consisting of the riffraff of Europe's mercenaries. His army was made up of Dutch, Danes, Swedes, Prussians and French Huguenots plus a few English, Scottish and Ulster regiments.

This was signed by the President of the Royal College of Maynooth and 2000 of the Professors and students, 4 lords and 72 baronets.[40] One of the Wexford rebels, Myles Byrne, wrote afterwards that "priests saved the infamous English government in Ireland from destruction".[41]

Individual Catholic priests like Father Murphy played an important leadership role in the rising, alongside the mostly Protestant United Irishmen leaders. According to Dickson "at least eleven Catholic curates took an active part and of these three were executed".[42] But their own Bishop described the rebel priests after the rebellion as "excommunicated priests, drunken and profligate couple-beggars, the very faeces of the Church".[43] Their role in the leadership of the rising was against the wishes of the hierarchy and out of a motivation to protect their parishioners from Loyalist atrocities.

Was the rebellion Protestant in the north and Catholic in the south?

A more complex attempt to deny the legacy of 1798 is to suggest that the northern and southern risings were not really connected. That the northern rising was Presbyterian and democratic while the southern was Catholic and sectarian.

Although the population (and thus the rebels) in the north were mainly Presbyterian and those in the south mainly Catholic, both armies contained considerable number of both religions. I've already mentioned some of the Protestant leaders in the south. Indeed, if partly to head off sectarian tension within the rebel army, United Irishmen commander Roche issued a proclamation on 7th

[40] The Wexford Rising in 1798, ibid, p 16

[41] Memoirs, Vol. 1, p39 (1906)

[42] The Wexford Rising in 1798, ibid, p 17

[43] A vindication of the Roman Catholic Clergy of the town of Wexford during the late unhappy rebellion, pub 1799

victim of a showtrial and execution was a Presbyterian from Ballymena, Willam Orr.

The current debate on the release of political prisoners could be much informed if Orr's pre-execution words were remembered "If to have loved my country, to have known its Wrongs, to have felt the Injuries of the persecuted Catholics and to have united with them and all other Religious Persuasion in the most orderly and sanguinary means of procuring Redress — If these be Felonies I am a Felon but not otherwise …".[39]

The role of the Catholic church

Although, by 1898, the Catholic church would choose to pretend it had led the Wexford rising, in 1798 nothing could be further from the truth. Dr Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, said within days of the rising (27 May 1798) that "We bitterly lament the fatal consequences of this anti-Christian conspiracy".

In fact the Catholic hierarchy was opposed to the radical ideas of the rebellion and, especially since the opening of the Catholic seminary at Maynooth, stood beside Britain and the Irish Protestant Ascendancy class. Three days after the rebellion had started, the following declaration came out of Maynooth

> "We, the undersigned, his Majesty's most loyal subjects, the Roman Catholics of Ireland, think it necessary at this moment publicly to declare our firm attachment to his Majesty's royal person, and to the constitution under which we have the happiness to live … We cannot avoid expressing to Your Excellency our regret at seeing, amid the general delusion, many, particularly of the lower orders, of our own religious persuasion engaged in unlawful associations and practises" (30 May 1798)

[39] Willam Orr, pre-hanging declaration, 2.45pm, 14 October 1796

William's army was slightly superior in numbers to James' and indeed the most capable soldier on James' side — Patrick Sarsfield advised against entering battle on the Boyne. James, however, overruled the advice, was overrun and beat a hasty retreat to Dublin where he immediately set sail for France, leaving the Irish people to suffer the consequences of his actions.

William's victory at the Boyne was greeted with enthusiasm in Rome. The Pope welcomed the victory of the "European Alliance" forces and Pontifical High Mass was celebrated in thanksgiving for the deliverance from the power of the Catholic Louis XIV and the Catholic James II. Meanwhile King Billy marched on and on July 7th entered Dublin. In rapid succession Drogheda, Kilkenny and Waterford surrendered but William's troops were repulsed at Athlone.

James' army, under the command of Patrick Sarsfield had fallen back to defend the line of the River Shannon. William laid siege to the city of Limerick, and leaving his army under the command of baron de Ginkel, King Billy left for England. The war between the two armies — both of whose "leaders" had fled the country was to continue until October 1691 with significant battles taking place at Athlone, Aughrim Galway and, of course, Limerick. On October 13th 1691 the Articles of Capitulation — to become known as the Treaty of Limerick — were signed and King Billy's victory was assured. Over 20,000 Irish men fled to France (becoming known in history as the "Wild Geese") and entered the service of the King of France where they formed the "Irish Brigade" and indeed it is reckoned that over the next fifty years 450,000 Irishmen died in the service of the King of France.

Thus an inglorious period of Irish history came to an end — a period around which there have been more myths propagated than Hans Christian Andersen or any other great storyteller could have dreamt of. It is a period of Irish history which the history books portray variously as a war between Protestantism and Catholicism or as one between the English King Billy and Irish patriots sup-

ported by King James II and the French. For a true perspective on these events, however, James Connolly's "Labour in Irish History" explodes the myths and I would in conclusion like to quote extensively from it.

> "It is unfortunately beyond all question that the Irish Catholics shed their blood like water and wasted their wealth like dirt in an effort to retain King James upon the throne. But it is equally beyond all question that the whole struggle was no earthly concern of theirs; that King James was one of the most worthless representatives of a race that ever sat upon the throne; that the "pious, glorious and immortal" William was a mere adventurer fighting for his own hand, and his army recruited from the impecunious swordsmen of Europe who cared as little for Protestantism as they did for human life; and that neither army had the slightest claim to be considered as a patriot army combating for the freedom of the Irish race."
>
> "The war between William and James (Connolly continues) offered a splendid opportunity to the subject people of Ireland to make a bid for freedom while the forces of their oppressors were rent in civil war. The opportunity was cast aside, and the subject people took sides on behalf of the opposing factions of their enemiesÉÉÉ. The Catholic gentlemen and nobles who had the leadership of the people of Ireland at the time were, one and all, men who possessed considerable property in the country, property to which they had, notwithstanding their Catholicity, no more right to title than the merest Cromwellian or Williamite adventurer. The lands they held were lands which in former times belonged to the Irish people — in other words, they were tribe-lands."

spective. This 'history' had several aims; to hide the role of the church hierarchy in condemning the rising (and instead claim that the church led the rising); to blame the failure of the rising on underground revolutionary organisation (as an attack on the Fenians); and to minimise the involvement of Northern Presbyterians and democratic ideals. In so far as they are mentioned the view is that "it was the turbulent and disorderly Presbyterians who seduced the law abiding Catholics".[37]

This history has therefore emphasised the rebellion in Wexford and elevated the role of the handful of priests who played an active part. Father Murphy thus becomes the leader of the rising. The fight was for 'faith and fatherland', as a statue of a Pikeman draped in rosary beads which was erected in Enniscorthy on the hundredth anniversary of the rising proclaims. Finally, the role of the United Irishmen is minimised. The leadership role of United Irishmen like Baganal Harvey, Matthew Keogh and Edward Lough, who were Protestant, is glossed over. The failure of the rebellion is 'explained' by the inevitability of revolutionary movements being betrayed by informers. Patrick Kavanagh presents Father Murphy as the sole heart of the insurrection, and the United Irishmen as "riddled by spies, ruined by drink, with self-important leaders … ".[38]

Issues of '98

To a large extent, these histories shaped the popular understanding of the rising. In this limited space it is impossible to address all the issues they raise. But there is a need for current revolutionary organisations in Ireland to dispel the illusions created of the past. This is particularly true with regard to Protestant workers in the north who are largely unaware that it was their forefathers who invented Irish republicanism, nor indeed that the first Republican

[37] ibid, p150
[38] ibid, p170

This explanation was handy for both the official and Catholic nationalist versions of the history. It suggested that the Protestant portion of the leadership was coincidental in what was otherwise a confessional or sectarian rising, depending on your point of view. This deception was credible because the United Irishmen membership lists for Wexford were never captured. This allowed ex-rebel leaders like Edward Hay to argue that "there were fewer United Irishmen in the county of Wexford then in any other part of Ireland"[35] .

The Orange Order

On the loyalist side, the Orange Order needed to minimise Presbyterian involvement in the rising and portray it as a purely sectarian and Catholic affair. So loyalist accounts have tended to focus on the Wexford massacres, often making quite false claims about their scale, who was massacred and why they were massacred. Musgraves (the main loyalist historian) in his coverage of the rebellion gives only 2% of his writing to the Antrim and Down rebellion while 62% of his coverage concentrates on Wexford.[36] The limited accounts given of the Northern rising portray it as idealistic Presbyterians being betrayed by their Catholic neighbours and so learning to become 'good loyal Orange men'. The scale of British and loyalist massacres of these Presbyterians is seldom mentioned.

The Centenary

More than anything else the Catholic nationalist history of the rising was determined by the needs of the Catholic church when faced with the socialist influenced Fenian movement one hundred years later. Patrick Kavanagh's 'A Popular history of the insurrection of 1798', published in 1870 was the major work from this per-

[35] History of the Insurrection in the county of Wexford, 1798

[36] The Tree of Liberty, ibid, p138

Finally from Connolly:

> "The forces which battled beneath the walls of Derry or Limerick were not the forces of England and Ireland but were the forces of two English political parties fighting for the possession of the powers of government; and the leaders of the Irish Wild Geese on the battlefields of Europe were not shedding their blood because of their fidelity to Ireland, as our historians pretend to believe, but because they had attached themselves to the defeated side in English politics. This fact was fully illustrated by the action of the old Franco-Irish at the time of the French Revolution. They in a body volunteered into the English army to help put down the new French Republic, and as a result Europe witnessed the spectacle of the new republican Irish exiles fighting for the French Revolution, and the sons of the old aristocratic Irish exiles fighting under the banner of England to put down that Revolution. It is time we learned to appreciate and value the truth upon such matters, and to brush from our eyes the cobwebs woven across them by our ignorant or unscrupulous history-writing politicians."

The 1798 Rebellion and the creation of the Orange Order

In 1798 Ireland was shook by a mass rebellion for democratic rights and against British rule. 200 years later 1798

continues to loom over Irish politics. The bi-centenary, coinciding with the 'Peace process', has attracted considerable discussion, with the formation of local history groups, the holding of conferences and a high level of interest in the TV documentaries and books published around the event.

It is rightly said that history is written by the victors. The British and loyalist historians who wrote the initial histories of the rising portrayed it as little more than the actions of a sectarian mob intent on massacring all Protestants. Later reformers sought to hide the program of 1798 to unite Irishmen regardless of creed. After 1798 they turned to the confessional politics of mobilising Catholics alone. Daniel O'Connell, the main architect of this policy, went so far in 1841 as to denounce the United Irishmen as "… wicked and villianously designing wretches who fomented the rebellion".[5]

So the first response to the Loyalist history in Ireland was an alternative but parallel history produced to suit a Catholic nationalist agenda. Both of these agendas neatly dovetailed in showing the rising as a fight for "faith and fatherland". This is illustrated by the treatment of two portraits of prominent figures in the rebellion. Lord Edward Fitzgerald had his red cravat[6] painted out and replaced with a white one. Father Murphy had his cravat painted out and replaced with a priest's collar! Within parts of republicanism and the left there have been attempts to rescue this history, starting with the memoirs of United Irishmen like Myles Byrne who chose exile over compromise. But, all too often, this history has been crushed beneath histories designed to fulfil the needs of the British and Irish ruling class.

James Connolly neatly described the Irish nationalist version of 1798 thus

[5] Freeman's Journal, 22 May, 1841

[6] Which represented not only a revolutionary badge but a defence of the execution of the French king Louis.

major battles by the experienced and better equipped. As in Wexford, the British burned towns, villages and houses they considered sympathetic to the rebels and massacred both prisoners and wounded during and after the battles. After the battle of Antrim, some were buried alive.[34]

The last major battle of the Northern rising was at Ballynahinch on 13th June. By the time the French arrived in Killala in August, it was too late, although their initial success does suggest that either the Wexford or Antrim rebels may have been much more successful if they had the benefit of even the small number of experienced French troops and arms later landed at Killala.

Some 32 United Irishmen leaders were executed in the North after the rising, including two Presbyterian ministers. Henry Joy McCracken in hiding after the rising, wrote a letter to his sister in which he sums up the cause of the failure of the rising as "the rich always betray the poor". He was captured and executed in Belfast on July 16th.

Post rebellion republicans

After the rising it was in the interests of those who had led it to minimise their involvement by insisting they were ignorant dupes or forced by 'the mob' to take part. A song asks "Who fears to speak of '98?". People researching oral histories have indicated that the answer was 'just about everyone'. Even the year of death on the gravestones of those who died in the rising was commonly falsified. The reason was the British campaign of terror, which carried on into the following century with chapel burning's and deportations of cart loads of suspects.

In Wexford, where the death penalty still applied to anyone who had been a United Irish officer, it was a common defence for ex-leaders to claim they were forced into their role by mobs of rebels.

[34] Revolt in North, Charles Dickson, 1960, p135

knowledge that the signal from Dublin indicated he should rise. Instead, presumably in part for the class interests already outlined, he preferred to wait for the French.

Nevertheless, the rank and file were determined there should be a rising and the lower officers with Henry Joy McCracken (who had just returned from jail in Dublin) forced Simms to resign on June 1st and got an order for a rising at a delegate meeting on June 2nd. This delay meant it was not till 5th that the rising started in Antrim, and 7th in Down. In the course of this delay, the northern rising was further weakened. Three of the United Irishmen colonels gave the plans to the British, taking away any element of surprise and allowing them to prepare for the rising.

More seriously, stories started reaching the north from the Wexford rebellion with the newspapers "rivalling rumour in portraying in Wexford an image of Catholic massacre and plunder equalled only by legends …". Many of these stories were false although some Protestant men had been killed in Enniscorthy. The distorted version that reached the north by 4 June (before the rising) was that "at Enniscorthy in the county of Wexford every Protestant man, woman and child, even infants, have been murdered". Alongside this were manufactured items like a supposed Wexford Oath "I, A.B. do solemnly swear … that I will burn, destroy and murder all heretics up to my knees in blood".

Later commentaries tried to deny the scale of the Northern rising, or have claimed that many Presbyterians failed to turn out. However, given all of the above, what is truly remarkable is how little effect all this had, in particular as by 5th the Wexford rising had clearly failed to spread. Of the 31,000 United Irishmen in the area of the northern rising, 22,000 actually took part in the major battles (more turned out but missed the major battles).[33]

Like the Wexford rising, the Northern rebels succeeded in winning minor skirmishes against the British but were defeated in the

[33] The United Irishmen, ibid, p260 -267

> "The middle class "patriotic" historians, orators, and journalists of Ireland have ever vied with one another in enthusiastic descriptions of their military exploits on land and sea, their hairbreadth escapes and heroic martyrdom, but have resolutely suppressed or distorted their writings, songs and manifestos."[7]

In short, although the name of the United Irishmen was honoured, their democratic ideas were buried even before the formation of the 26 county state.

In the 1840's Ireland once again fell under the influence of a wave of international radicalism. They sought to uncover the real aims of the 1798 rebellion. The republican organisation of the 1840's, the Young Irelanders "celebrated the United Irishmen not as passive victims or reluctant rebels, but as ideologically committed revolutionaries with a coherent political strategy".[8] They placed a marker on the grave of the key United Irishmen leader, Wolfe Tone, at Bodenstown. Paying homage at the grave is an essential annual rite for any party wishing to claim the republican legacy.

These different histories mean that even within republicanism there was little agreement about what the real legacy of 1798 was. In 1934 when Protestant members of the Republican Congress arrived at Bodenstown with a banner proclaiming 'Break the connection with capitalism' they were physically assaulted and driven off by IRA members.

Of particular note is the way the women of 1798 have either been written out of history altogether or exist only as the faithful wives of the nationalist histories and the blood crazed witches of the loyalist accounts. Like other republicans of that period the United Irishmen — for the most part — did not see a role for women, although "one proposal was made that women should have the vote

[7] Labour and Irish History, James Connolly, ChVII

[8] The Tree of Liberty, Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760 — 1830, Kevin Whelan, p167

as well"[9] . Nevertheless a number of women, including Mary Ann McCracken, played an important role from an early period in promoting the organisation, and a Society of United Irishwomen was established in 1796.[10]

In the run up to the rebellion, women were particularly active in subverting the Militia. They would swear in soldiers and also spread rumours that the troops were going to be sent abroad. Women were active in the rebellion, not just in 'traditional roles' of medical aid etc., but also in quite a number of cases as combatants. However, almost all of these roles seem to be ones that individual women demanded and fought for, there is little evidence of any serious effort on the part of the United Irishmen to mobilise women.

An overview of the Rebellion

In the Autumn of 1791, societies of United Irishmen were formed in Belfast and Dublin. Initially the organisation limited itself to calling for democratic reforms including Catholic emancipation[11] . In response to popular pressure, the British government — which effectively ruled Ireland — initially granted some reforms. This period of reform ended in 1793, when war broke out between revolutionary France and Britain.

In December of 1796 the United Irishmen came the nearest they would to victory, when 15,000 French troops arrived off Bantry Bay. Bad weather prevented the landing and saved Britain from defeat. After Bantry Bay, Irish society was bitterly polarised as loyalists flocked to join the British army and the United Irishmen's numbers swelled massively.

[9] A history of the Irish Working Class, Peter Berresford Ellis, 1972, p71

[10] The Women of 1798 : Representations and realities by Dáire Keogh in 1798 ; 200 years of resonance, Ed. Mary Cullen

[11] Catholic emancipation was the demand for the removal of laws that discriminated against Catholics

then thousands flock to join the rebel hilltop encampments. However the superior tactics, arms and training of the British forces was to prove a match for the rebels. On 4th and 5th June the rebellion suffered its most decisive defeat at the battle of New Ross, and on 9th the defeat at the battle of Arklow was the last major attempt to spread the rebellion to neighbouring counties.

Wexford town was however liberated for three weeks. At the time it was thriving and had a population of 10,000, many of whom were Protestants. After liberation, a seven man directory of the main United Irishmen and a 500 strong senate took over the running of the town. Both of these included Catholic and Protestant members. In addition each area / district had its own local committee, militia and elected leader. The time before it was retaken was not sufficient for much constructive activity beyond the printing of ration coupons. However the limited reorganisation of local government that did occur, and its success in maintaining order until just before the town fell, demonstrates the often denied political side of the Wexford rebellion.[31]

On 21st the final major battle of the 'Wexford republic' was fought at Vinegar Hill. It had taken some 20,000 British soldiers three weeks to crush the 30,000 Wexford rebels who were "utterly untrained, practically leaderless and miserably armed".[32]

Events in Antrim/Down

The North had also seen a savage campaign of British torture which had terrified, disorganised and disarmed many of the United Irishmen. General Knox had told General Lake that his methods were also intended to "increase the animosity between the Orangemen and the United Irishmen". Robert Simms who was Adjacent-General of the United Irishmen in the north simply refused to ac-

[31] The Wexford Republic of June 1798 : A story hidden from history, Kevin Whelan in 1798 ; 200 years of resonance, Ed. Mary Cullen

[32] The Wexford Rising in 1798, ibid, p41

the information of informers, had seized the gathering point for the rising. In the confusion there was little chance of the rank and file of the United Irishmen gathering to create an alternative plan. And the second rank of leadership, which could have created an alternative plan, failed to do so precisely because it now feared the uncontrolled 'mob'.

> Precisely as had been warned "when the people come forward, the aristocracy, fearful of being left behind, insinuate themselves into our ranks and rise into timid leaders or treacherous auxiliaries."

The Wexford Republic

A limited rising occurred around Dublin which was rapidly and brutally suppressed. Loyalists and British forces unleashed further terror in the rest of the country. In Wicklow and North Wexford this included the execution of over 50 United Irish prisoners, the murder of civilians and the burning of homes.

There was United Irishmen organisation in this area, Wexford town was considered the preferred landing place for the French. But the bulk of the 300 or so United Irishmen here do not appear to have been preparing for a rising. One historian of the rebellion, Dickson, reckons that "without a French landing and without the compulsion applied by the magistrates and their agents … there would have been no Wexford rising at all".[30] and his account demonstrates that the early battles were spontaneous clashes. The all important initial victory was at Oulard, where there was no real rebel commander and some of the United Irishmen were armed only with stones.

The Oulard victory demonstrated that the British army were not unbeatable. This, and the increasing repression, saw hundreds and

[30] The Wexford Rising in 1798, Charles Dickson, 1955, p36

By the Spring of 1798, a campaign of British terror was destroying the United Irishmen organisation and many of the leaders had been arrested. The remaining leaders felt forced to call an immediate rising, even though this would be before French aid could arrive. The date was set for May 23rd. A number of factors undermined the rising in Dublin. However major risings occurred in Wexford in the south, and Antrim and Down in the north. Elsewhere there were minor skirmishes. By the autumn — despite a small French landing — the rebellion had been defeated, tens of thousands were dead and a reign of terror had spread over the country.

Origins of the rising

The 1798 rising occurred at a unique moment in world politics, the point at which parliamentary democracy (and capitalism) was replacing absolute monarchy (and feudalism). The American Revolution of 1771–81 and the French Revolution of 1789 were the key inspirations for those who were to lead the rebellion in Ireland. Wolfe Tone described how "the French Revolution became the test of every man's political creed, and the nation was fairly divided into two great parties &endash; the aristocracy and democrats".[12]

To this was added the severe oppression the majority of Irish people lived under. The country was bitterly divided , two wars had been fought in the previous century with the combatants split along religious lines. The native Catholic landowning class had been forced either to surrender their lands or to convert to the Anglican religion. In parts of the country, in particular the North-East, even the ordinary Catholic tenants had been forced off the land, to be replaced with Presbyterian 'planters' brought over from Scotland. This left a legacy of sectarian rivalry which helped the British to 'divide and rule'.

Although some reforms had been won, the situation by the 1780's was that the country was ruled by Anglican landowners,

[12] quoted in Labour and Irish History, ibid, Ch VII

with Presbyterian landowners having only limited political power, and Catholic landowners none. Beyond this, the mass of the population, Catholic, Protestant (Anglican) and Dissenter (Presbyterian) had virtually no rights at all. In 1831 there were 6,000 absentee landlords, who owned over 7,000,000 acres.

The complete subjection the peasantry were subjected to is hinted by a traveller through Ireland at the time who wrote

> "A landlord in Ireland can scarcely invent an order which a servant, labourer, or cottier dares to refuse to execute… A poor man would have his bones broken if he offered to lift a hand in his own defence … Landlords of consequence have assured me that many of their cottiers would think themselves honoured by having their wives and daughters sent for to the bed of their master."[13]

There were famines in 1740, '57, '65 and '70. The first of these alone killed 400,000.[14]

The arrival of capitalism had seen the beginnings of a working class. There were at least 27 labour disputes in Dublin from 1717 to 1800 and the formation of the early trade unions had started.[15] "There were 50 combinations in 27 different trades in Dublin in the period 1772–95. There were at least 30 food riots … in the period 1772–94.."[16]

This atmosphere of revolutionary ideas on the one hand, and brutal oppression on the other, was the climate in which the United Irishmen were born in 1791. This initially reformist organisation, at first composed of the Protestant middle class was to choose within

[13] Arthur Young, in his Tour of Ireland quoted in Labour and Irish History, ibid, chap IV

[14] A history of the Irish Working Class, ibid, p54

[15] The United Irishmen, Nancy Curtin, 1994, p 147

[16] The Tree of Liberty, ibid, p92

The Orange Order attacks had inevitably introduced sectarianism into the Defenders. But the United Irishmen saw this sectarianism as being due to the influence of priests, and directed only against Protestant landlords. This was to prove a serious under estimation, particularly outside of the north.

The Rebellion

In December of 1796, a French Fleet appeared off the shores of Bantry Bay with 15,000 French soldiers and Wolfe Tone. Rough seas and inexperienced sailors prevented a landing which would have liberated the country from British rule. The British campaign of terror against the United Irishmen which followed was seriously undermining the organisation by 1798. In the Spring of 1798, pressure was mounting for a rising without the French, and after the arrest of most of the Leinster leadership a date for the rising was set by those who escaped.

The key to the rising was to be Dublin. It was intended to seize the city and trigger a message to the rest of the country by stopping the mail coaches. However, although thousands turned out for the rising in the city, it ended up as a fiasco with almost no fighting. The reasons why this happened can be found in the class basis of the leadership of the United Irishmen.

Once it was clear that the rising was going to happen without the French, it was also clear that there was no mechanism to hold back the workers and peasants from going beyond the bourgeois democratic and separatist aims of the rising. The key informer who betrayed the Dublin rising, Reynolds, had turned because of fears of his ancestral estates being confiscated.[29]

Edward Fitzgerald, Neilson and the others who planned the May 21st rising in Dublin were willing to risk this. But they were arrested and removed from the scene by May 19th. The British, on

[29] Citizen Lord : Lord Edward Fitzgerald, 1763 — 1798, Stella Tillyard, p246

der[24] conducting armed attacks on Catholics. However the arming of the Catholics had "the full support of a radical section of Protestant political opinion"[25] . These origins are important, as later historians have attempted to portray the Defenders as purely a Catholic sectarian organisation, a sort of mirror image of the Orange Order.

In 1795, up to 7,000 Catholics were driven out of Armagh by Orange Order pogroms. The United Irishmen provided lawyers to prosecute on behalf of the victims of Orange attacks. "Special missions were dispatched there in 1792 and again in 1795 and senior figures like Neilson, Teeling, McCracken, Quigley and Lowry worked the area ceaselessly … ".[26] Many expelled Catholic families were sheltered by Presbyterian United Irishmen in Belfast, and later, Antrim and Down. These expulsions facilitated the spread of Defenderism and fear of the Orange Order to other parts of Ireland.

The Defenders were already politicised to some extent by the hope of French intervention and their anti- tax and anti-tithe propaganda. They proclaimed "We have lived long enough upon potatoes and salt; it is our turn now to eat mutton and beef"[27] . Despite their rural origins the Defenders were not a peasant movement but "drawn from among weavers, labourers and tenant farmers … and from the growing artisan class of the towns". By 1795 there were some 4000 Defenders in Dublin, closely linked with many of the republican clubs in the city. The complex nature of the Defenders is illustrated as "in Dublin there were Protestant Defenders" even though "revenge against Protestants was certainly an important element in Defender thinking"[28] .

[24] Then known as the 'Peep O Day boy' after their practise of carrying out dawn raids on Catholic homes

[25] The Defenders, p18, Deirdre Lindsay, in 1798 ; 200 years of resonance, Ed. Mary Cullen

[26] The Tree of Liberty, ibid, p128

[27] The Defenders, p19, ibid

[28] Ibid, p20-22

a few years to take the path of launching a democratic and anti-colonial revolution.

Leadership Vs masses

According to the Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Lords — shortly before the United Irishmen were founded — Tone, Samuel Neilson and others in the north circulated a Secret Manifesto to the Friends of Freedom in Ireland. Towards the end this contained a description of past movements that was to prove prophetic as a description of events in 1798

"When the aristocracy come forward, the people fall backwards; when the people come forward, the aristocracy, fearful of being left behind, insinuate themselves into our ranks and rise into timid leaders or treacherous auxiliaries."[17]

Once the United Irishmen had decided to take the direction of rebellion, they had to win the mass of the people actively to join in such a rebellion. To do this they highlighted the economic advantages of reform. Gaining the vote for rich Catholic landowners would mean little to those paying rent for this land.

Dr Willam James MacNeven, under interrogation by the House of Lords in 1798, when asked if Catholic emancipation or parliamentary reform mobilised 'the lower orders' said "I am sure they do not understand it. What they very well understand is that it would be a very great advantage to them to be relieved from the payments of tithes and not to be fleeced by the landlords"[18] In 1794 they asked "Who makes them rich? The answer is obvious — it is the industrious poor".

Historian Nancy Curtin points out that "Some united Irish recruiters … suggested that a major redistribution of land would follow a successful revolution" and that as a result "To a certain extent republicanism became associated in the common mind with low

[17] Quoted in Labour and Irish History, ibid, Chap VII

[18] The United Irishmen, ibid, p28

rents, the abolition of tithes and a tax burden borne by the wealthy and idle rather than by the poor and industrious"[19]

The Union doctrine; or poor man's catechism, was published anonymously as part of this effort and read in part

> "I believe in a revolution founded on the rights of man, in the natural and imprescriptable right of all citizens to all the land … As the land and its produce was intended for the use of man 'tis unfair for fifty or a hundred men to possess what is for the subsistence of near five millions …"[20]

Before 1794 the role consigned by republican leaders to the masses was one of fairly passive displays of support for change. For example Illuminations (where people put lights in their windows) were important to show the level of public support.

Following the 1794 banning of the Dublin United Irishmen the masses became more actively involved. Riots were organised by the United Irishmen, particularly around the arrival of the new Viceroy, Camden, in March 1795, when aristocrats were stoned in the streets of Dublin.

As public demonstrations were banned, various ruses were used to gather United Irishmen together. Race meeting were used as pretexts for mass assemblies. Mock funerals with up to 2,000 'mourners' would be held, sometimes the coffin would actually contain arms. In the countryside mass potato diggings (often for imprisoned United Irishmen) were organised and often conducted as military drills. These were a way of seeing who would turn out and how well they would follow orders.

This following of orders was central to the preparation for rebellion, as the United Irishmen's leadership wanted to be able to control and discipline the masses in the event of a rising. This was also

[19] The United Irishmen, ibid, p. 119 — 120

[20] quoted in 1798: the United Irishmen and the early Trade Unions, Mary Muldowney in SIPTU Fightback No 7

why a French landing was central. The French army would help not just to beat Britain, but also to control the masses. The original strategy for the rebellion was for only a few thousand United Irishmen to join the army of the French (and for these to be quickly disciplined).

This is the context in which Tone's "Our freedom must be had at all hazards. If the men of property will not help us, they must fall; we will free ourselves by the aid of that large and respectable class of the community — the men of no property" must be taken. Yes, the United Irishmen had turned to the 'men of no property', but the leadership still intended to run the show, and with French help hold back the masses if necessary.

After 1794, with the turn towards revolutionary politics and the need to mobilise the masses, the class basis of the United Irishmen underwent a radical change. Dublin membership of artisans, clerks and labourers rose to nearly 50% of the total.[21]

Other popular political societies in Dublin in the 1790's included 'the Strugglers'. One judge referred to "the nest of clubs in the city of Dublin". Their membership was said to consist of "The younger part of the tradesmen, and in general all the apprentices". The informer Higgins described these clubs as comprising "King killers, Paineites, democrats, levellers and United Irishmen".[22]

The link with the 'Defenders'

A central part of the strategy for mass rebellion was to build links with the already established movements, and in particular the Defenders. The Defenders had started as a local 'faction' (gang) in Armagh and were initially non-sectarian, their first Captain being Presbyterian.[23] Armagh was the scene of intense political agitation around the arming of Catholics, with the Protestant Orange Or-

[21] The United Irishmen, ibid, 1994

[22] The Tree of Liberty, ibid, p77 — 79

[23] The United Irishmen, ibid, p 149.