

# MARX AND ENGELS ON IRELAND—II.

[We continue this month the second instalment of the *Correspondence of Marx and Engels illustrating their attitude on Ireland*. The extracts have been made by T. A. Jackson, who has also provided an Introduction and explanatory Notes. The letters printed in this instalment have been specially translated from the German edition of the *Correspondence between Marx and Engels* now being published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.]

**T**HIS second instalment is connected with the culmination of the Fenian conspiracy in 1867; and the attitude of the International Working Men's Association thereto.

The Fenian Movement centred upon the activity of a secret, armed, revolutionary Nationalist society called variously the "Fenian," or the Irish Republican, Brotherhood. At its height it had a definite central organisation both in Ireland and the U.S.A., as well as branches in Britain and the Colonies.

The actual beginnings of Fenianism—(the name, by the way, is an allusion to the traditional Fianna, the fighting confederation led by the legendary Len Finn) seem to have been, in part, a reorganisation (in 1852) of some of the elements enrolled during the '48 under the disguise of a literary and debating society. A fresh start was made in 1860 with the launching of an open agitation as at one and the same time an advertisement of, and a camouflage for, the secret organisation.

In 1863 a newspaper, the *Irish People*, was established in Dublin, and the preparations for insurrection were superintended by James Stephens (the "Head Centre") from its office. By 1865 it was plain that the possibility of a rising was near. Common rumour numbered the Fenians by the hundred thousand, while the conviction of Fenian agents detected administering the oath of allegiance to the Irish Republic to soldiers in the British Army gave evidence that the authorities had reason for the alarm they began to show. A raid on the office of the *Irish People* made prisoners of the chief Fenian leaders (other than Stephens), among them Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. Stephens himself was located and arrested a month later, but escaped within a fortnight through the connivance of Fenians on the prison staff.

The trials (which had revealed the existence of police spies among the leaders) ended in sentences of prolonged periods of penal servitude—O'Donovan Rossa, the most defiant of all, to the longest, "for life."

After delaying all through 1866 Stephens was compelled by the active spirits in the U.S.A. to give a "positive assurance" that fighting would

begin with 1867. Arrangements were made for the night of February 12, 1867, to be the day and the word was given to this effect. Part of the plan was staged for the day before, in England.

Again spies were at work and the authorities put on their guard. In several places actual attacks were made upon police barracks—the police being on the alert, the insurgents achieved no success.

A similar fate overtook the rising on the date, March 5, to which the Dublin chiefs had deferred the action. It was clear that the authorities were on the alert, and hence, although many thousands mustered at the various rendezvous next to nothing could be even attempted.

This second fiasco completely discredited Stephens (who had remained all the time in Brooklyn, U.S.A., directing operations from afar). He was deposed and replaced by Colonel T. J. Kelley, an Irish-American, who had superintended the escape of Stephens in 1865. A fresh rising was planned for September, 1867, and in connection therewith Kelley visited England. He and his lieutenant, Deasy, were arrested "on suspicion" by the Manchester police, and on September 18, 1867, were committed for trial. The local Fenians had, however, been mobilised, and the "Black Maria" which was bearing them to the Salford Jail was held up under the railway bridge which crosses the Hyde Road by an armed band. Kelley and Deasy were liberated and made their escape, one of the police guard being killed. Unfortunately the covering party were not so successful, and three of them were captured. The three prisoners (along with a number of others, collected in an indiscriminate raid on the Irish quarter of Manchester) were indicted for murder.

Five prisoners were tried together: Allen, Larkin, O'Brien, Condon and Maguire (the latter a private in the Royal Marines). All were found guilty, and all sentenced to death.

Owing to the worthlessness of the evidence, after an agitation two of them, Condon and Maguire, were subsequently released, but the other three were hanged as "murderers" on November 23, 1867.

This treatment of political offenders as common murderers excited furious indignation among Irish Nationalists, and no less disgust among militant British workers—repercussions of which can be traced in the letters following. The Fenian conspiracy broke down as an organised movement—lacking any co-ordinating centre that could survive in the general atmosphere of suspicion. It split first into fragments: then into isolated groups—finally (to a large extent) into individual elements. It was established, however, permanently, as a sentiment which later found a succession of organised expressions. Reorganised in 1893, and reconstructed in 1910, it (under its official name of Irish Republican Brotherhood) provided the main body of the rising of Easter week, 1916.

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It was one of the "break-away" groups, quite out of touch with the main body which organised the crude and abortive attempt to effect another rescue from Clerkenwell prison in December, 1867, which Marx condemns in his letter of December 14, 1867.

With regard to the attitude of the International Working Men's Association on the Fenian movement, as in subsequent instalments of these letters further important references to the discussions will be found, any comment that may be necessary will be deferred till then.

However, it is very important, and indeed significant, in relation to the present stage of the Irish struggle against British Imperialism, to note the three things that Marx considered in 1867 would express the desire of the Irish: (1) Self-Government and Independence from England; (2) Agrarian Revolution; and (3) Protective Tariffs against England.

That English workers must include in their platform a demand for the repeal of the Union and that only "experience must show later whether the merely personal union between these two countries can continue to exist."

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### MARX TO ENGELS.

*November 30, 1867.*

DEAR FRED,

If you have read the newspapers, you will have seen that (1) the Memorial of the Council of the International on the Fenians has been sent to Hardy<sup>1</sup> and that (2) the debate on Fenianism was public and that it was reported in the *Times*. There were also present reporters from the Dublin papers, the *Irishman* and the *Nation*.

I arrived very late (I have had a fever for about a fortnight which has only left me two days ago) and indeed would not have intervened; firstly, because of feeling run down after the fever, and, secondly, because of the ticklishness of the situation. Nevertheless, the chairman, Weston, wanted to force me and so I moved the adjournment and pledged myself to speak last Tuesday. I had in fact prepared for last Tuesday not a speech but the *points* of a speech. However the Irish reporters did not turn up; we waited for them till nine o'clock and we only had the hall till ten-thirty.

On my instigation Fox<sup>2</sup> had prepared a long speech. When the session was opened, I declared that on account of the lateness of the hour I would waive my right to speak in favour of Fox. As a matter of fact, because of the recent executions at Manchester,<sup>3</sup> our subject, Fenianism, had become linked up with the passions and emotions of the moment, and this would have forced me (but not the abstract Fox) into revolutionary

fulminations instead of my intended objective analysis of the situation and movement. So by remaining away, and thus causing a belated opening of the session, the Irish reporters have done me a great service. I don't like getting myself mixed up with people like Roberts, Stephens and Co.<sup>4</sup>

Fox's speech was good, first because it was made by an *Englishman*, and, secondly, for its purely political and international aspects. But he only touched on superficialities. The resolution which he brought forward was bad and lacked content. I opposed it and got it referred back to the standing committee.

What the English do not understand is that since 1846 the economic grip, and consequently also the political aim of the English rule in Ireland has entered upon an entirely new phase, and that, for this reason, Fenianism is characterised by a socialist tendency (in a negative sense as directed against the appropriation of the land) and has become a "Lower orders' movement." What can be more absurd than to lump together the barbarities of Elizabeth and Cromwell who wanted to supplant the Irish by English colonists (in the Roman sense) and the present system which wants to supplant them by sheep, cows and pigs! The system in force from 1801 to 1846 (evictions during this period being only exceptional, principally in Leinster where the land is particularly good for rearing cattle) with its rackrents and middlemen, fell to pieces in 1846. The repeal of the Corn Laws which was partly the result of, and in any case, was accelerated by the Irish Famine, took from Ireland the monopoly of providing England with corn in average seasons. Wool and meat was the watchword, and so the conversion of tillage into pasture. Out of this there developed the systematic consolidation of farms. The Encumbered Estates Act,<sup>5</sup> which turned a mass of former middlemen who had feathered their nests into landlords, accelerated the process. The clearing of the estates in Ireland (!) is now the only thought of English rule in Ireland. The stupid English Government in London naturally understands nothing itself of this immense change since 1846. But the Irish know it. From Meagher's proclamation (1848) up to the Election Address of Hennessy<sup>6</sup> (1866), the Tory and Urquhartite, the Irish have expressed their consciousness of this fact in the clearest and most forcible manner.

Now comes the question, what are we to advise the *English* workers to do? In my opinion they must include as a clause in their platform the *Repeal of the Union* (in short the joke of 1783<sup>7</sup> only democratised and brought up to date). It is the only *legal* and so only possible form of Irish emancipation which can be accepted as part of the programme of an *English* party. Experience must show later whether the merely personal union between these two countries can continue to exist. I half believe it can if it were to take place at once.

What the Irish want is : (1) Self-government and Independence from England ; (2) Agrarian Revolution. With the best will in the world, the English cannot do that for them but they can give them the legal means to do it for themselves ; (3) Protective tariffs against England.

From 1783 to 1801 all branches of Irish industry were in a flourishing condition. The union, by breaking down the protective tariff wall which the Irish parliament had erected, destroyed all industrial life in Ireland. The very small linen industry in nowise compensates for this. The Union of 1801 had the same effect on the whole of Irish industry as the measures for the suppression of the Irish woollen industry, &c., passed by the English parliaments under Anne, George, &c.<sup>8</sup>

As soon as the Irish are independent, necessity will force them to become Protectionists like Canada, Australia, &c. Before I bring my point of view before the Central Council (next Tuesday—this time, I hope, without the presence of reporters), I'd be very glad if you could let me know yours in a line or two.

Yours, K.M.

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MARX TO ENGELS.

*December 14, 1867.*

DEAR FRED,

This last escapade of the Fenians in Clerkenwell<sup>9</sup> is very stupid. The mass of the Londoners, who had shown much sympathy for Ireland, were made angry by it ; and were thus thrown into the arms of the Government Party. It is not to be expected that the London proletarians will allow themselves to be blown up for the greater glory of the emissaries of the Fenians. Such secret, melodramatic and conspiratorial methods generally end in failure . . . . .

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LONDON.

*December 17, 1867.*

DEAR FRED,

The London correspondent of the *Irishman* will, if you will write it in English, get published in that Dublin paper as coming from him in correspondence form a column of criticism of the book<sup>10</sup> (in which, however, Ireland must play the real rôle). I send you a couple of copies of the paper and you will see what has to be done . . . . .

NOTES.

<sup>8</sup> "HARDY"—Gathorne Hardy, then Home Secretary, afterwards Lord Cranbrook.

<sup>9</sup> "FOX"—Peter Fox, Secretary to the General Council, I.W.M.A.

<sup>10</sup> "EXECUTIONS"—of Allen, Larkin, and O'Brien (see introduction).

“ROBERTS, STEPHENS, & Co.”—Rival leaders of the factions into which the I.R.B. had split. JAMES STEPHENS, the original Head Centre; W. R. ROBERTS, the leader of the anti-Stephens section in America. It is noteworthy that Marx’s opinion of the contending leaders was shared by John Mitchell, the ’48 leader, who was at this stage invited by both factions to place himself at the head of the movement. He refused to meddle in its quarrel.

“ENCUMBERED ESTATES ACT”—An Act which enabled the inheritor of an entailed estate “encumbered” with debt to compound with his creditors by surrendering part of the estate at a valuation.

“MEAGHER-HENNESSY”—THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER, one of the ’48 leaders, known as “Meagher of the Sword” in consequence of a burst of rhetoric in favour of the “sword” as against the “moral force” of the O’Connellites which precipitated the split between O’Connell and the Young Ireland Party. JOHN POPE HENNESSY (afterwards knighted), a Cork man, made a brilliant debut in the House of Commons, being elected for N. Tipperary with Fenian support in opposition to a Governmental candidate backed by the local landlords. He was said at the time to “have nobody but Disraeli himself between him and the leadership of the Tory Party.” He accepted a colonial governorship and retired from Parliament for a number of years, but returned later to sit for his old constituency as a Nationalist. In the split of 1890 he sided against Parnell.

“THE JOKE OF 1783”—In 1783 the British Parliament (under pressure of (a) the revolt of the American Colonies; (b) the war with France; (c) the Volunteer Movement in Ireland, led in the Irish Parliament by Henry Grattan; and (d) “unrest” among the British “lower orders” such as found expression in the Gordon Riots, 1780) passed, at the demand of the Irish Parliament a “Renunciation Act” which stated specifically: “the right claimed by the people of Ireland to be bound only by laws enacted by His Majesty and the Parliament of that Kingdom shall be established. . . for ever, and shall at no time hereafter be questioned or questionable.”

“THE UNION [of the Parliaments of Ireland and Britain] had an effect on the whole of Irish Industry, &c.”—that is to say, whereas the Parliament of Ireland, virtually independent since 1782, had systematically protected Irish agriculture and industry as against that of Britain, the Union under a pretence of incorporating Ireland in Britain, reversed the process and gave the British manufacturers a steadily increasing advantage over those of Ireland.

“CLERKENWELL”—To effect the rescue of a Fenian chief imprisoned in the Clerkenwell prison a scheme was designed to blow a hole in the wall of the exercise-ground through which the prisoner could escape—he having been warned by a white ball thrown over the wall from outside, during the exercise-hour. The plan was carried out, a barrel of gunpowder was wheeled up to the wall on a barrow, a fuse passing through the bung-hole was lighted, the ball was thrown, and the conspirators scuttled out of range of the explosion. This, which came in due course, had effects quite other than those designed. True, several tons of masonry, in the shape of a huge V were driven out of the prison-wall (which was some four feet thick at the base), but the main force of the explosion, alike direct, and by rebound from the wall, was felt by the crowded tenement houses which formed the other side of the street. Nearly the whole street was wrecked; the houses nearest to the explosion-centre completely collapsed, the upper-stories of the houses on either side were destroyed, two people were killed outright, several others died later from injury and shock; altogether some 120 casualties resulted—mostly to women and children—including more than one fatal premature confinement.

The affair was condemned even more by the main body of Fenian opinion than it was by Marx above.

<sup>10</sup>THE BOOK—*i.e.*, Volume I. of Marx’s *Capital*, published a few days before. Engels secured the insertion of a review (anonymous) in the *Irishman*.