

# Ireland: is Home Rule enough?

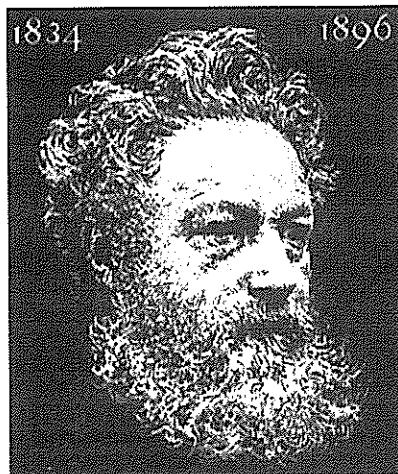
## As we were saying

The great pioneer socialist William Morris who died 100 years ago this year, was like all the other early British Marxists — in the first place HM Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation — an ardent, active supporter of Irish self-government. In 1885, with the Liberal Party on the verge of coming out for Home Rule and the Tories negotiating with the Irish Home Rule leader, Charles Stuart Parnell, Irish self-government seemed imminent. In fact, nearly four decades would pass before Ireland achieved self-government. William Morris commented in *Commonweal* (October 1895).

MR Parnell will have his way, and, as he says, this coming Parliament will be the last in which the Irish representatives will sit at Westminster.

Well, this is revolutionary, and we revolutionists rejoice in it on those grounds, and in the blow which it will deal at the great Bourgeois Power — the British Empire: also it may well be that Ireland must become national before she can be international. Yet we must ask ourselves what is to come next; will Ireland ruling herself be progressive, revolutionary that is, or reactionary? Will socialists find their work easier in the Parnellite Ireland than now?

There is no doubt as to the answer to those questions if we are to go no further than Mr Parnell would have us; the fullest realisation of his programme would bring Ireland to pretty much the state of things which Liberal reformers want to realise in England as a bar to the march of socialism which they have at last heard of, and are beginning to fear. An improved landlordism founded on a wider basis and therefore consolidated; that would lead, it seems to me, to founding a nation fanatically attached to the rights of private property (so called), narrow-minded, retrogressive, con-



William Morris

tentious, and — unhappy.

I ask Irishmen to consider a somewhat parallel case, that of Italy. Italy as well as Ireland had an unconquerable yearning for national independence, which swallowed up all other aspirations; in the teeth of all difficulty she conquered her independence amidst the best wishes of generous-minded men of all parties. How our hearts burned within us as we heard of the exploits of her patriots; surely revolution for the world was drawing near, though some of us did not know what the new revolution was to be, as we followed the heroism of Garibaldi and the lofty morality of Mazzini.

Italy triumphed and became 'free' and united; those noble deeds accomplished that at least. What, then, has been the gain? I will not say nothing, but I will say something very small compared with all the energy, enthusiasm, and self-sacrifice that brought it about, very small compared with the high-wrought hopes that went before it. For whatever the gain was, it was confined to the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat did not share it, has not shared it.

In the midst of the richest gifts of nature and art, cradled by the history of the world, exists a population of which the following words can be said without contradiction: "According to some the average pay (of the labourers) runs from 3d to 4d a day, according to others to 7d, without making any allowance for loss of time either through bad weather or ill-health. For this pittance they have to work like galley-slaves, and out of it such of them as have families must provide food for their children and keep a roof of some sort over their heads... Such then are the free workmen of Italy while as a nation, under her Constitutional King and Liberal Parliament, she

ambitiously strives to snatch here and there some rag of stolen territory which may help her to get a share of the world-market from the older European firms, and keep on foot a goodly army of warlike idlers to that end. Italy is free and united, and is almost a 'great power' while the mass of her population is living to speak bluntly, in abject slavery."

Here then is a warning to Irishmen if they will take it; they can see what the barrenness of the programme of driving out the Teutons has led to in Italy; can they think that a similarly barren programme of driving out the Saxon will lead to anything better in Ireland?

If the sword of Garibaldi could have led the workers of Italy to a condition under which what they produced would have been their own to live upon, the Austrians and their kingly and grand-ducal deputies would have been suppressed as they are now, and no 'foreigner' could govern them against their will; but the places of the Austrian tyrants would not have been taken by the great collective tyrant Capital, who prevents poor people from eating, and murders them with 'pellagra' or famine-fever as it has been called in Ireland, a tyrant who has no heart to be softened, no soul to be moralised, in spite of Mazzini and the Positivists.

If only the Irish could take this lesson to heart, and make up their minds that even if they have to wait for it, their revolution shall be part of the great international movement; they will then be rid of all the foreigners that they want to be rid of. For my part I do not believe in the race-hatred of the Irish against the English; they hate their English masters, and well they may; and their English masters are now trying hard to stimulate the race-hatred among their English brethren, the workers, by all this loud talk of the integrity of the Empire and so forth. But when once the Irish people have got rid of their masters Irish and English both, there will, I repeat, be no foreigners to hate in Ireland, and she will look back at the present struggle for mere nationality as a nightmare of the charmed sleep in which landlordism and capitalism have held her so long, as they have other nations. To the Irish, therefore, as to all other nations, whatever their name and race, we socialists say, your revolutionary struggles will be abortive or lead to mere disappointment unless you accept as your watchword, wage-workers of all countries unite!

● This article, which has been slightly abridged, was printed under the title "Ireland and Italy — a warning."

## Legitimising Loyalism

By John McNulty\*

YOU advocate a position within the socialist movement which I believe seriously damages the interests of the working class. There are many obstacles to serious debate. A major one is consistent misrepresentation of my position in your columns. Nowhere do I argue that past connection with Loyalism carries an eternal taint. You run past and present together because your project is revisionist. You don't need a new Loyalism — which in any case does not exist — because your intention is to legitimise old Loyalism, red in tooth and claw. To do this you draw an equals sign between Loyalism and Republicanism. Finally, you assert a right to separation in the Unionist community.

But to be a successful revisionist you need to meet certain criteria. An honest revisionism needs to be based on the facts of the case, to indicate at what point it breaks from existing Marxist theory, and the theoretical basis of such a break.

You fail these tests. Your revision exists merely at the level of assertion, mixed in with slander. It defies the facts of the case and eviscerates Marxism.

You ask how we can talk to Republicans when there have been Republican atrocities. The answer is quite simple. Such atrocities fly in the face of the programme of the movement, which demands a secular democracy with equal rights for all faiths and opposes sectarianism. There is no such contradiction in the programme of Loyalism. Atrocity is the programme. They were the defenders of "A Protestant parliament for a Protestant people" who mourn its passing. Their battle was alongside the state forces against the most oppressed layers of society. Their weapon on every occasion was undiluted terror and the random killing of working people because of their religion — and let us not forget that the initial Loyalist mobilisation was not in reaction to a sudden Republican push for a united Ireland, but in response to demands for civil rights which implied a retreat from the goal of a united Ireland on the part of nationalists.

And of course the whole point was not to "talk" to Republicans but to work with them against a savage state repression and for a whole series of democratic rights. The question of working with Loyalists never arose because they supported the state repression and opposed the democratic rights!

This encapsulates much of the history of Marxism in relation to Ireland. Marxists have defended democratic rights in Ireland, including the right to self-determination. Their natural allies in this struggle have been the Republicans — the Loyalists have stood firmly on the other side of the barricade in alliance with imperialism.

This of course carries no weight with you because your most basic revision of Marxism — expressed simply as assertion — concerns

the "right" of the Unionist community to separation. This novel idea calls out for a great deal more explanation on your part. Do you assert a right of all national minorities to separate or is this a unique right of unionism? In practice a global assertion of this nature would be a denial to self-determination. All nations have minorities and if they all had the right of secession there would be no development of nations in the first place. Would this right of separation apply to nationalists within the North? Could we have a crazy patchwork of communities, all with the right of separation? Would you have any grounds for opposing, as you do, organisations such as the Nation of Islam? What happens to the unity of the working class during this fragmentation?

Of course, a much more logical and coherent argument on this question existed in the past — the two-nations theory. It has the fundamental flaw that no significant section of Unionism asserts a nationhood beyond a "Britishness" familiar to all students of colonial history that, even if accepted, would leave them with Irish ethnicity. That only leaves us where we began — with a state based on Protestantism. Marxists must oppose such sectarian formulations — especially when we have already seen them in action.

It's true that since the Downing Street Declaration Unionists have talked of their right to self-determination. What does this mean? It doesn't mean that they claim a new nationhood or a state of their own. They claim the right to a British state and thus the "democratic right" to license a British military occupation in Ireland.

We therefore move logically from the things you say to the things you leave unsaid. The dog that doesn't bark in the night is the central concept in the Marxist analysis of Ireland — the concept of imperialism. Any attempt to explain the history of the North in general or of the last 25 years in particular as essentially fuelled by sectarian conflict can only be achieved by doing a great deal of violence to the facts. All the signposts — internment, Bloody Sunday and so on — were played with the British state centre stage. What is the North if not a British colony? When did Britain stop being the imperialist power and become some sort of red cross organisation, pouring in billions and committing massive military resources to help the mad Irish?

You try to shift the ground of the debate to your own caricatures of our position. We have made many mistakes in the past 25 years, but not the mistakes that you accuse us of. We are willing to discuss and debate our history and correct mistakes — in fact our programme, now being readied for publication, attempts to do this, but we would rather do this with those who accept the reality of British imperialism in Ireland and the poisonous role of Loyalism as its vicious unofficial auxiliary.

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Editor's note: the next issue of Workers' Liberty will carry a reply to this letter.

## X-Files feeds paranoia

By Ruah Carlyle

IN "reviewing" of the *X-Files* (WL29) my intention was not to criticise the *X-Files* as drama, as in this it is very good, but rather its wider message, which is very bad — as I said, "Tapping a real vein of paranoia."

So it's got good plots, the leads aren't jumping into bed together — so what?

Good programmes aren't rare. What's wrong with the *X-Files* is that it portrays fantasy on the verge of fact. People contracting Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (CJD) — plausible, fact. People contracting CJD from eating the brains of other infected humans — not plausible, bullshit!

Now, in fiction there is nothing wrong with bullshit. That's why we don't say "bye-bye" *Brave New World, 1984* and other such works of fiction.

But the *X-Files* often pretends to be fact. A factual episode about the "Jersey Devil" goes hand in hand with rampant paranoia — for example, about the government doing deals with aliens, or, yes, "New Age bullshit" such as the last episode of the series (which just stopped in mid story) with alien shenanigans and some mystical sub-plot about American "indians."

OK, Mulder says: "Trust no one." Fine. That doesn't mean automatically assuming everyone is lying, or believing crap!

## Trainspotting: art not propaganda

By Brad Cleveland

FRANK J Higgins is not sure *Trainspotting* balances an account of the (ephemeral) pleasure of drug-taking with "the sure consequences of dependence on hard drugs". He wonders if it is not therefore "a criminal piece of proselytising", "a very talented, heartless, and maybe dangerous commercial exploitation piece."

I appreciate the tentativeness of Frank's argument (although I'm not sure how tentative you can be about a film being "dangerous" or "criminal": I suppose the point is that it's hard to gauge other people's reactions). A few points in response.

One: Frank says the cartoon-quality of the film off-sets the horrors it undoubtedly shows ("the very liveliness of the film works against it."). This is a matter of perception. To my mind, a story which shows one person (the

'cleanest' at the beginning) dying in utter squalor of AIDS, another losing her child, the main character almost dying from an overdose, et cetera, is hard to consider "proselytising", however surreal and energised its description of these events. (A 'drugs professional' I know complained that the film implies addicts can't look after children, which she found objectionable). Nor is it fair to say that all of this is played for laughs (indeed, much of it is the more horrifying because it's sudden tragedy in the midst of comedy).

It may be that some people watch it and go straight from the cinema to the nearest smack dealer.

But the issue of perception is vital here. Most people who work in this field consider it pointless merely to rail against the dangers of drugs, and prefer to focus on how to use drugs safely, or on less melodramatic methods of pointing out the dangers. The people who object to this approach, who see in it an encouragement of drug use, are generally people who have absolutely no intention of taking drugs. I suspect those who have taken most offence to *Trainspotting* are often people for whom the drug culture is utterly alien. *Trainspotting* is of course a film, not a health education manual, and I don't wish to suggest its makers intend it to be one, or are motivated by the same concerns as health educators (nor that they should be). But the central point holds, I think: that the more one perceives the film as glamorising drugs, the less likely one is to be affected.

Two: Frank doubts the 'artistic truth' of the film, if it is unbalanced. Artistic truth is a pretty tough nut to crack. To my mind, the truth of *Trainspotting* hangs on how true it is to its source material, both Irving Welsh's book, and more generally the society, sub-culture, or whatever, it is dramatising. I can't comment on the book, since I haven't read it. On the sub-culture, it seems to me that the film's lack of imposed, 'authorial' moralising is indeed its truth. These characters do not see drug-taking as immoral. It might be dangerous, even lethal — and we see that. But the film portrays the drug culture from the point of view of its participants, and reflects their attitudes towards it. Dramatically, artistically, to impose some alternative view on it, to force it to tell a different story, would be artificial, false — artistically false, if you will.

I suspect that the film makers do run too far with the argument that, as film makers, they have no social responsibility. Perhaps it would be possible to tell this story with more 'balance' without shattering its internal logic. I agree with Frank that Renton's ability to start shooting up without immediately becoming an addict again is implausible, and a violation of artistic or dramatic truth. But I can't agree that the absence of 'balance', the absence of a hard, unmissable moral that heroin screws you up, constitutes a lack of 'truth'.

Three: Frank seems to counterpose 'artistic truth' to 'commercial exploitation', which I take to mean that the attitude to drug-taking is a sensational device to make money: Hodges, Boyle, and MacDonald

counted on the controversy they knew *Trainspotting* would generate to bring in audiences. Clearly, a film that people are talking about is more likely to be successful, and a 'hot' subject is more commercial, than something utterly uninteresting. Sometimes Boyle et al seem to have defended their approach to the drug culture with the argument that they didn't expect large audiences anyway, which, while it is true that there are no guarantees of commercial success in film-making, is fundamentally spurious (no one aims to be unsuccessful).

But it does not follow from this that the film's viewpoint is cynical, 'exploitation', or 'heartless'. Heartlessness is fashionable in contemporary film, although partly in reaction to Hollywood schmaltz. But to me, the characters in *Trainspotting* are emotionally engaging. Its ultimate focus is less on drugs themselves than on the destruction of friendship caused by money (the theme also of *Shallow Grave*), and the emptiness of much contemporary life.

Four: "dangerous"? There is an enormous and growing problem of drug use in Britain. About a million people (I have heard the figure five million, but I find that hard to believe) take Ecstasy every weekend (I understand that the book of *Trainspotting* focuses less exclusively on heroin). Part of the problem is the effect on people's health. But even much of that problem is caused by the drugs' illegality, the consequent unpredictability of what people actually take, plus the whole culture of drug gangs and violence, the crime caused by people needing money to buy drugs, and so on.

Simple moralising has had no effect in preventing drug use or addiction. I would not claim that *Trainspotting* is an antidote to all of this. I doubt a film could be. But its success suggests to me that it has touched a nerve because huge numbers of young people identify with its characters. Because it does not merely moralise, because it shows the 'up' side of the drug culture, its portrayal of the 'down' side, I think, is the more effective, cartoonish or not. This is not to say that the film is an encoded *Christiane F.* But before people accuse it of "proselytising", or call it "dangerous", they should consider its context.

All this said, I accept that *Trainspotting* is not unambiguously anti-drugs. Good film, like all good art, does not necessarily have to deliver a clear 'message'. Good film treats its audience as adults who are capable of dissecting the ambiguities it presents them with, of making up their own minds. Too often the left is utterly insensitive to this aspect of creative activity: it expects the film-maker to be above all a propagandist. So directors and screenwriters who are to a degree propagandists (like Ken Loach and Jim Allen, for example), are lauded; others, who either don't have such a clear political viewpoint, or don't wish to inject it unambiguously into their work, are viewed more sceptically.

But art thrives on ambiguity, uncertainty, doubt. *Trainspotting* would have been diminished by a kind of 'authorial', injected moral clarity.

## Should "abolish all" be our slogan?

By Colin Foster

SHOULD "abolish all immigration controls" be our slogan? Mark Osborn ("Forum", *WL30*) is rightly concerned that we should defy racist prejudice, but I think he concedes, in effect, that "abolish all..." is not very good as a slogan. The slogan needs to be tied to socialist ideas for jobs, houses, public services, etc., ideas which most people other than revolutionary Marxists see as remote and difficult.

Surely, we make slogans not out of all our beliefs, but out of those where just a few words, on their own, make an idea clear to large numbers of people.

That the idea of freedom of movement has become a slogan for the British left, in the form of words "abolish all immigration controls" is, I think, a peculiarity of British imperial history rather than a matter of principle. I know of no other country where revolutionaries use such a slogan (except perhaps the US: overseas readers may be able to correct me). French revolutionaries, for example, in my experience, see the slogan as incomprehensibly abstract and maximalist.

We have it in Britain because until 1962 we had freedom of movement into Britain from the Empire and the Commonwealth; and we had that because before modern mass long-distance travel, the British ruling class never imagined that more than a tiny elite would ever want to come to Britain from India, Pakistan, the West Indies, or Africa. When Labour, in 1968, and the Tories, in 1971, shut the doors on most Commonwealth citizens, the left rightly protested — and, in the 1970s, the slogan had some immediacy and grip.

Does it have that now? In fact, despite what Brad Cleveland writes (*WL29*), I don't think the left uses the slogan much any more. Most campaigning is around individual deportation cases or particular measures like the Asylum Bill. Can we find slogans which are less abstruse than "abolish all...", more positive than just resisting deportations and new Tory measures, and bolder than the detailed list given by Brad Cleveland, which is more an agenda for a pressure-group than a banner to get masses on the streets?