

Gramsci in Mayo: a Marxist perspective on social movements in Ireland

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What is Ireland like as a context for social movements?

This paper draws on Antonio Gramsci, and Marxist social movement studies more generally, to understand some of the complexities and peculiarities involved in theorising movements in the Republic of Ireland. The paper is primarily theoretical, but is grounded in the real intellectual and political problem of giving an adequate account and explanation of the specificities of Irish social movements, with which I have grappled for several years. The question is a huge one, and this draft paper is hardly more than an initial sketch - but one whose justification may be found in the relative absence of other attempts at tackling the problem. If this attempt provokes better answers from other quarters, that is in itself a useful contribution.

The question “what kind of movement context is Ireland?” is rarely considered seriously but should be an absolutely basic starting point for research and theory in this area. The most common response in mainstream academic writing is simply not to think about the question, whether out of provincialism or the equally naïve assumption that Ireland is not fundamentally different from the contexts in which most social movement research and theory is produced. A second approach, which hardly represents an improvement, is to see Ireland as simply deficient vis-à-vis Britain, North America or Western Europe.

As I have noted elsewhere (Cox 2010), such analyses ignore the fact that the island of Ireland is one of very few states anywhere in the world where peasant struggles succeeded in producing a land reform which transformed rural class relationships and land ownership structures; it is one of only a handful of west European situations where irredentist movements were even partially successful in achieving independence; Northern Ireland has been massively structured by social movement conflicts for the past forty years; while the Republic is one of very few states where popular movements successfully

defeated nuclear power, and the impact of women's, GLBTQ and survivor movements on religious power is equally rare on a global scale. Even today, the struggle in Erris over Shell's pipeline stands out for its long trajectory and the number of defeats it has managed to inflict on one of the world's largest companies, far beyond the norm for such conflicts.

Existing analyses

We need, then, a more adequate understanding of *how Ireland works* in terms of social movements. A number of sketchy approaches do exist. Hilary Tovey (2007) has proposed that Irish environmentalism, at least, is more like Mediterranean than Anglo-American forms. Going back in time, the comparison between Irish and Latin American movements has been made by movement organisers since the 1970s at least, though to the best of my knowledge it has not been formally thought through¹. It is probably true to say that the only sustained attempt to analyse the specificities of Irish social movements is the Marxist tradition initiated by James Connolly (1910) of understanding the situation in terms of "labour and nation", socialism and republicanism, etc. *Contra* much contemporary rhetoric, an analysis of social movements in terms of ethnicity and empire has been central to Marxist writing on Ireland for over a century.

This analysis is clearly fundamental not only to Northern Irish politics but to the relationship between southern movements and Irish Catholic identity; it is present in one of the most illuminating analyses of the Irish women's movement (Coulter 1993) as well as in other ways in the analysis both by Tovey (1993) and Robert Allen (2004) of the politics of rural struggles over industrial development, all of which identify tensions of social class and ethno-cultural identity in recent social movements. It is clear that a theory which leaves out this basic fact will miss the point completely; but at the same time, there is much that this approach does not tell us.

For a variety of reasons - both the historical matrix of Connolly's original formulation and the centrality of the Northern Irish conflict in the minds of state-oriented political thought

¹ Cox 2011a draws on Foweraker's analysis of Latin America to argue that Ireland and Latin America, unlike western Europe and north America, lack the wide "middle ground" within which post-war social movements have been able to develop large institutional structures substantially independent of the state. In both Ireland and Latin America movements either become part of the state (through co-option and clientelism or, occasionally, through movement success as in Bolivia) or they remain on the edge, targets of repression and cultural marginalisation.

- far less attention has been given to understanding the characteristics of the Republic and southern Catholicism as *ethnic* (rather than religious) identity. Post-colonial writing does acknowledge the absolutely basic fact that society in the South is in some important ways a once-subaltern social movement which has become state, dominant ethnicity, and a variety of key social institutions - very similar in this, of course, to many of the world's states outside the global North - but has far less to say about contemporary social movements.

The "labour and nation" approach also has less to tell us about other kinds of (partial) social movement success and how it can be theorised. In particular, the losers in these struggles are often less closely scrutinised, despite the fact that they are often intimately bound up with the victors. It is true that there is a substantial body of literature on the defeat of the "men of no property" in the process of the "Irish counter-revolution" (Regan 2001), and on the subordination of the labour movement to bourgeois nationalism.

Understanding movement success, defeat and subordination

However to the best of my knowledge there is no serious analysis of the ways in which the success of the Land War and commercially-oriented farming - at the expense of second and subsequent sons and daughters, those who became relatives assisting and emigrants, on the backs of the landless labourers and the bodies of those who were incarcerated in Magdalen asylums and industrial schools - affected social agency. The losers in these struggles were in many cases family members of the victors, and the nature of their political agency (other than that of those who acquired religious vocations) is simply unstudied.

It seems on the face of it likely that much of this agency was thoroughly subordinated to that of their brothers and landlords, but to the best of my knowledge the question has yet to be tackled seriously. Neither Coulter nor Linda Connolly (2002) really think through the political implications of the subordination of (part of) the women's movement to victorious nationalism - indeed Connolly has argued that the ICA and even more the IHA should be seen as radical organisations simply for the fact of existing, rather than recognising their fundamentally subaltern character in the context of Catholic nationalism.

Probably the biggest gap is in studies of popular mobilisation, after independence, *in favour* of the new state and Catholic supremacy. These were the years, after all, in which mass-based political parties representing a (partially) successful independence struggle and a combination of the victorious social classes along with subaltern groups such as

women and labour held power together with enormous levels of popular participation in the dominant religion and its various sodalities and voluntary organisations and the years of political and cultural repression of sexuality, writers, republicans, communists, atheists and so on. It is no accident that organised public opinion was supportive of Franco (the Irish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War), Salazar (de Valera's personal inspiration) and Mussolini. Ireland between the 1930s and 1950s was not fascist; but its closest parallels were certainly with the elite-sponsored, nationalist and religiously conservative authoritarianisms of Spain, Portugal and Italy as well as regimes like Horthy's or Petain's.² This much belongs, perhaps, to the politics of memory: as in Latin America or Spain, this history is still too close and too many of the perpetrators are still alive for anything like an honest historical account. But without a clear recognition that the majority of publicly active Irish people *colluded* - voted for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, were active in their local church, accepted censorship and attacks on political dissidents, and were aware that there were priests to keep your children away from, that Artane could be used as a threat and that there were institutions to get rid of girls who brought the family name into disrepute - we will understand nothing of the past, or come to that the present³. Irish social movement history is not simply post-colonial history: it is also a history shaped by popular collaboration with authoritarian cultural nationalism.

In terms of (partial and very ambiguous) movement success, we lack serious studies of this first process of movement institutionalisation. We also need a proper overall analysis of the second wave of movement institutionalisation: of how the eventual defeat of religious power at the hands of social movements (the women's movement, GLBTQ activists and most recently survivor organisations) has worked; of how Ireland's entry into the EEC and the calculations of movement elites led to strategies geared towards legal and media

² Reflecting on Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage theory, it makes sense to see most or all political parties in the Republic as well as most institutions of cultural identity formation as representing the "periphery" (in terms of the pre-independence situation) vis-à-vis those identifying with the "core" (unionist and mainland UK positions). In narrow party terms, of course, Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and until their recent demise the PDs all share this matrix of origins; the only major parties not to do so are Labour and the Greens, and more recently the ULA. This perhaps makes it easier to understand the nature of political conflict within the Republic, as characteristic post-colonial conflicts within a newly independent ethnic identity.

³ The Archbishop of Dublin has recently protested at the overestimation of levels of abuse by clergy; what he did not note was the extent to which other clergy (and not simply the hierarchy) were aware of it and did nothing.

activism (and hence professionalised, middle-class modes of organising at the expense of popular struggle and alliance-building) not only in the women's movement but also in environmentalism; of more recent movement attempts to capture the capitalist high ground (the pink pound, green consumerism, fair trade and organic food); the process of social partnership as the co-option of trade union leaderships, the remaking of community struggle as a form of state-driven service delivery and the assimilation of a wide range of other movements; and the success of the *rhetoric* of civil society, active citizenship and so on in political discourse as a cover for neo-liberal "consultation" and "participation" of the most contained and constrained kinds (CAP 2000).

This history is at some level so obvious, and familiar to older activists, that it seems hard to go beyond polemic and develop theory. But theorise we must, if we want to get beyond outrage and despair to understand how movements can and do move forward. Despite the shameful silence maintained by most funded environmental organisations, for example, the Rosspoint struggle continues. Despite the Labour Party attempts to simulate "civil society", the Occupy movement has spread to towns as small as Letterkenny.

Eppur si muove, and in fact this is the crux of the theoretical problem: theories of movement tend to stop short when movements succeed, or are absorbed within the state, become subaltern parts of dominant coalitions, etc. - while theories of state and society (still) have little enough to say about the role of social movements, even in a context like Ireland where - north and south - the existence of those societies and states in their current form can hardly be understood *without* reference to social movements: which are duly referenced, but not thought through.

This paper, then, starts from the assumption that it is fundamentally mistaken to attempt to analyse social movements in isolation - to write a study of *any* movement which does not take serious account of its context. This has to mean more than a tip of the hat to mainstream social movement theory - in particular because the canonical histories of how that history came to be are seriously misleading (Flesher Fominaya and Cox, forthcoming). It means having at least a rough and ready understanding of the historical and local context within which movements come into being, which is what alone can explain *who* gets involved and who does not; who supports them and who opposes them; and, in the Irish context, how *other* social movements (those which are becoming part of the state and those which are on the outside) operate.

Gramsci in Mayo

The question of how to understand the national and regional peculiarities of social movement organising was central to Gramsci's thought. At a national level, as a key organiser during the European revolutionary years 1919-20 and ultimately party leader in the years of widespread defeat (as well as the struggles in the CPSU following Lenin's death: Daniele 1999), the question of how to understand the Italian situation was of immediate practical interest. Why had the revolutionary years led to a socialist government in Russia, a nationalist one in southern Ireland, the fall of the Kaiserreich - but also so many defeats? What line should the Italian party take in the face of rising fascism and the disastrous experience of repeated insurrectionary failure in Germany? How should the CPd'I's leadership group understand and argue their national case vis-à-vis their revolutionary comrades in the context of the Comintern's internal struggles over direction? And so on.

At the regional level, Gramsci (who had started as a Sardinian nationalist, opposed Northern Italian racism against Southern migrant workers and distinguished himself by arguing for alliances between Northern workers and Southern peasants) was constantly interested in how to form the potential for a *nationally* hegemonic party on the basis of an adequate understanding of regional specificities, and pays great attention in the *Prison Notebooks* to understanding these differences. In this respect, Gramsci is a more robust thinker than Connolly, whose response was rather to dismiss these differences (and, perhaps, ultimately fall victim to them).⁴

*Antonù su gobbu*⁵

I once began a classroom discussion of Gramsci by identifying Sardinia as the Mayo of Italy. There are distinctions, of course; but also clear similarities. The Sardinia of his day was remote and peripheral, a land of poor tenant farmers with a largely alien ruling class (of which his father formed part until his imprisonment), from which migrant workers such as his brother travelled to the Turin factories, others found work in mining and the occasional bright boy such as Gramsci could escape on a scholarship. More generally, of

⁴ For biographies of Gramsci see Fiori (1990) and Davidson (1977); for an overview of interpretations see Liguori (1996); for some scholarly approaches see Baratta and Liguori (1999) or Burgio and Santucci (1999).

⁵ See Nairn's (1982) classic essay of this title.

course, the Italian South in this period bore the same kind of relationship to the North in his analysis as did Ireland to Britain, and his analysis of the South and its politics is directly relevant to thinking Irish social movements.

Gramsci's work is full of attempts to understand the politics of the "South and islands": his analysis of Italian unification in terms of the extension of Northern political and economic power over the South, for example. His analysis of clientelist power relationships and the power of "traditional" intellectuals such as the village priest, doctor, lawyer etc. to represent local peasant needs bears directly on Curtin and Varley's (1995) classic analysis of "consensual" community development in rural Ireland, where local notables are identified with the "community" *tout court*. So too does his account of the way in which the rural middle classes colonise the administrative apparatus.

Again unlike Connolly (but having equally to argue against the mainstream of a labour movement which thought in terms of linear modernisation), Gramsci's account of all of this does not exclude a *critique* of peasant culture, local particularism and cross-class nationalism in his struggle to build alliances between peripheral peasants and metropolitan workers. In this analogy, of course, our equivalent to Turin would not be Dublin but rather Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow and so on - and what in Gramsci are internal politics would be rather a process of mutually critical and supportive international solidarity, as indeed his wider European politics were.

The Southern Question

Characteristically, the Lyons Theses (adopted at the last clandestine Party congress prior to the full imposition of fascist dictatorship in 1926) and "On the Southern Question", which he was working on up to his arrest, tackle these complex theoretical and strategic issues through concrete examples, of which three are particularly salient.⁶

Two of these concern the politics of migrant Sardinian workers in Turin: in one case scuppering the attempt by the emigrant middle classes to set up a cultural nationalist association in favour of a communist reading group; in the other, more dramatically, fraternising so effectively with a Sardinian regiment sent to put down a strike that it had to be withdrawn under cover of darkness. If the first story sets class above nation or region, the second refuses to deny the combination of both in practical identities: the soldiers

⁶ These can be found in English in Gramsci 1978 among other locations.

believe that the workers they have come to shoot are “gentry”, and it is the Sardinian origin of the strikers that convinces them of the truth, that the workers are not in fact any better off than the soldiers themselves.

Gramsci’s third example highlights the developmental character of his politics in relation to the South. Bitterly hostile to Northern racists, for whom Southern peasants and migrant workers both were simply backward, he argues instead that the important thing is to build alliances of the poor, and to do this by supporting whatever efforts towards independent organisation, free of local elites, Southern peasants could make. In the face of rigged elections in the South, the Turin left offered in 1914 to elect the radical (but anti-socialist) Southern politician Gaetano Salvemini to their own constituency, with no strings attached, as a representative of the Southern peasant movement. This is practical solidarity with a peripheral movement whose problems are acknowledged, but treated as something to be overcome.

More generally, “The Southern Question” bears reading in its entirety as his most mature attempt to theorise the relationship between metropolitan and peripheral social movements in the development of alliances geared towards the emancipation of both. If the Italian Resistance was able to strike deep roots in rural areas as well as in the cities, and if the post-war Communist Party (and indeed the Socialist Party) was able to build genuine alliances of workers and peasants, it was due in no small part to Gramsci’s arguments and strategies in the 1920s and his effective demolition of the position that led Northern workers to become the modernising allies of Northern capital at the expense of the South (Magri 2011).

In what follows I want to ask what the Sardinian Gramsci might see in Mayo and Ireland, from the Land War to Rossport. As an aside, we can note that Ireland appears in one of the most famous of all Gramscian discussions, that of war of position and war of manoeuvre. Here, relying on metaphors from the First World War - the rapidly-shifting fronts of the East and the trench warfare of the West - Gramsci famously argues that the Russian Revolution only had to capture the state and everything else followed, while the defeat of western revolutions in 1919 was due to the fact that a much broader structure of “civil society” had to be conquered first.

What is less well known is that Gramsci goes on immediately to discuss a third kind of war, “underground warfare”, which he identifies with the Irish war of independence and by implication represents the struggle of a colonised society against a militarily superior coloniser: he notes that the IRA’s “form of warfare and of organisation was related to the

structure of Irish society”⁷. In the Italian context Gramsci can hardly have failed to think of the history of brigandage as a form of popular hostility to the new Italian state. His arguments on all three types of warfare also prefigure the anti-fascist Resistance.

A processual theory of Irish movements

Elsewhere Alf Nilsen (2009) and I have worked on processual theories of social movements - something which is absolutely fundamental in the Irish case if we are to explain the phenomenon of movement-become-state (as not only in Ireland but in many postcolonial settings, and currently in South Africa). Such categories are also important if we are to understand the processes Lash and Urry (1987) capture as “organisation and disorganisation from above” (by states and major economic players, as in the formations of Keynesianism and neoliberalism respectively) and “organisation and disorganisation from below” (the latter referring in particular to 1968 and new social movement struggles which destabilised popular support for Fordist arrangements) - in other words the politics of changing regimes of accumulation and the alliances that underpin them.

We will need these same approaches if we are to seriously understand the co-optation of movements in Irish social partnership. Gramsci offers us some important concepts for doing this, and I want briefly to clarify two often misused concepts (intellectuals and hegemony) in relation to theorising movements in Ireland⁸.

Firstly, for Gramsci, intellectuals are *organisers* as much as they are *theorists*; they exercise “directive” as well as theoretical activity. Thus the organic intellectuals with whom he hoped to form the new communist party were local trade union activists, peasant leaders and so on. The educational task of supporting the development of such people (one which implies a Freirean approach: Mayo 1999) is thus inseparable from their development as political organisers, on whatever level. The traditional intellectuals of village life are the local priest, doctor, lawyer and so on - those formed by previous social formations.

⁷ Interestingly, the English editors of the text (Gramsci 1971: 231 fn 27) assume that the “Irish bands” must mean the Fenians in the late 19th century, but from context (“partisan warfare”) the reference is clearly to the internationally resonant model of the War of Independence, which was studied as far away as Burma in this period.

⁸ See Gramsci 1966 for the background texts discussed here.

Intellectuals are *organic* to the extent that as a group they are being formed by the developmental processes of a new class (or, as with peasants, a class finally becoming a class-for-itself). It is not a matter of people from a particular background who finally go to college, as in the convenient misreading all too widespread in Ireland; it is rather a question of the extent to which the institutions, ideas and practices such organisers draw on are *of the class, of the movement* rather than a simple indoctrination into official ways of doing things. Taking working-class community activists and orienting them towards a belief in the official pieties of constitutional politics, or education as a tool for individual social mobility, is not the creation of organic intellectuals.

Organic intellectuals, in Gramsci, are often the intellectuals of the newly dominant class or class fraction: managers, time-and-motion men - or today consultants, marketers, policy workers and so on. The massive formation of a whole new class who *believed in* the national-developmental project, and forged careers in the process is the development of such a group - as is, subsequently, the construction of the new private-sector service class which has most effectively yoked Ireland to multinational corporations and international financial institutions.⁹

Movement, then, is practically expressed by the development of new leadership groups - from above and below - and the alliances they forge with old (“traditional”) leadership groups, together with the infrastructure of social classes, class fractions or other social groups coming to self-consciousness, entering into political struggle and “making themselves”. This is one of the weaknesses in the “betrayal by leaders” theory (represented, for example, in Kieran Allen 1997) of the Irish working class; while it is undoubtedly true that it had, and has, developed contending intellectual groups, it is equally true that the consistent victory after 1913 of those who spoke for subordination and practiced co-option relied and relies on popular reflexes of respectability, acceptance of the project of national economic growth, cultural nationalism and a strong desire for “mainstreaming” of working-class institutions. The importance of the present moment, perhaps, is that never in a hundred years has that particular leadership relied on such a fragile infrastructural base, as a result of partnership’s demobilisation of popular activism and the collapse of its economic feasibility.

⁹ A particular variant of this class can be found at managerial level in any third-level institution in Ireland.

Hegemony for beginners

Hegemony as a term was originally used to describe the relations between ancient Greek city-states. A bit like the relationship between the present-day USA and its west European allies, the hegemon (be it Sparta, Athens or later Macedon) did not occupy its client states but rather led a system of alliances, expected them to provide military forces in war and extracted tribute. Gramsci's hegemony, similarly, is not the simple manipulation of popular opinion often represented in bad media studies courses, but is rather a process of alliance-construction.

A social group, for Gramsci, becomes hegemonic to the extent that it is successful in leading other groups. It does so in part by subordinating some of its own corporate (particularist) interests and (partially) meeting the needs of its allies. It is typically always competing with other fractions within its own class, and employs coercion as well as consent - neither among the elite nor among the wider population does it have or seek universal support. Hegemony is not permanent, but is a fragile achievement which is usually temporary - measured in decades rather than centuries.

Thus there was a clear shift, in Ireland, between the hegemonic alliance of forces we now term "Dev's Ireland" (primarily national capital, large farming, and the church with the subordinate support of small farmers, small business, organised labour and women) and that we now recognise as the beginnings of neo-liberalism: a shift to an IBEC led by multinational interests, with national capital and even more so small business definitely subaltern; a long-term ditching of the church in order to make a "liberal", modernising alliance with the new service class and with women; two decades of conflict with labour and working-class communities followed by two decades of partnership from which we are now emerging. Thus even within the newer, modernising alliance there are a series of shifts in hegemonic alliances: there is no doubt that we are living through another such shift at present, although its outcome is as yet unclear.

From below, it is more accurate to think in terms of proto-hegemony than anything else. A broad social alliance, such as that manifested around women's rights, Carnsore, or more recently Rossport, is an aspect of the "war of position": the putting in place of a possible coalition which *may* be able to fight a "war of manoeuvre" to actually shift the main lines of power - nuclear power was defeated and church power was at least partially dislodged. Such alliances - the development of links between the working-class left, poorer rural interests and culturally radical social movements - hold significant *potential* which may or may not then translate further.

As we know, both the environmental movement and the women's movement split, with elite-oriented forms seeking professionalisation, access to lobby, funding, involvement in policy-making processes and drawing on particularly media- and legal-oriented forms of activism. These modes of co-option, in the 1990s and 2000s, ensured that such proto-hegemonic alliances did not go on to challenge wider power relations; the Labour Party in particular has been a vehicle for integrating such movement elites under the broad banner of subordination to IMF / ECB dictates, and more widely to neo-liberal "There is No Alternative". At present, small "liberal" concessions are offered by way of compensation for the failure to advance working-class economic interests in any substantial way.

A historical sketch

With this in mind, we can ask how Gramsci might analyse the historical formations of hegemony in the republic. As noted Irish social movements writing rarely attempts serious comparison of Irish movements with those abroad. A Gramscian analysis would note the situation of movement-become-state (Catholic nationalism) in the early decades, highlighting the extent of continued popular mobilisation in nationalist and religious institutions during the "Irish counter-revolution" (historically parallel to continental fascism) and the subordination of other movements to developmentalist nationalism (shared with much of Latin America).

His analysis of "common sense" as a composite terrain of struggle vs "good sense" (grounded in practical, situated knowledge) goes far to explain the peculiar post-independence combination of practical cooperation with local power with *sotto voce* critique - particularly when contrasted with the dramatic ruptures of the independence movement. (This is often explained by elites in terms of a colonial mentality and by organisers in terms of fear - but the scale of practical repression in Ireland, while significant, has been far *less* than in most west European countries over the same period; the real fear has been of stepping outside clientelist relationships and the narrow tolerance that has been extended, in other words of ceasing to be part of the "community" as conservatively defined.)

If we see the Republic in this sense of movement-become-state - one of the most successful land reform movements in European history underpinning one of the earliest successful irredentist movements - then we can make considerably more sense of its subsequent politics. As in post-colonial polities like India or South Africa, the state claims a popular legitimacy, initially from these struggles and subsequently from the national-

developmentalist project, even when in practice this is replaced by a neoliberal one. Radical social movements struggle to gain a hearing when significant popular groups continue to accept this kind of practical and intellectual leadership (and when the most visible institutions of popular self-organisation, be they political parties and religious bodies or labour, peasant, women's and environmental movements, are constantly being drawn into the processes of renewal of the national elite).

A Gramscian analysis would need to study the ways in which the remarkable levels of self-organisation visible in the Land War, the cultural nationalist project and the dual-power structures of the War of Independence were channelled, contained and ultimately demobilised in the process of the long Irish Revolution (say 1879 - 1924), as well as the ways in which the working class, women and small farmers in the 1910s were split by nationalism and the First World War, used as footsoldiers for the nationalist cause and by the mid-1920s put firmly back in their various boxes. It would have to highlight particularly the dramatic scope of the popular struggle for land reform and the achievement of political independence, and the ways in which these energies were contained within an ultimately conservative political project.

A key part of this analysis, as Gramsci writes, would be seeing "coercion as the armour of consent", and the ways in which "carceral Catholicism" and anti-Republicanism were used to police the boundaries of what was acceptable. The latter, together with anti-communism and attacks on atheists etc., was a very effective tool for much of the 20th century in containing popular movements within a broad framework of loyalty to the established order (including self-policing on demonstrations as well as in the wider sense.)

By "carceral Catholicism" I mean the combination of Magdalen asylums, industrial schools and institutionalised abuse - the systematic targetting of the most vulnerable children as part of the maintenance of a particular regime of "biopower" - together with the broader situation where the shift from multiple inheritance to primogeniture created vicious power dynamics *within* families around inheritance and the right to have relationships, marry and start families - denied to the vast majority of Irish people by the post-famine combination of primogeniture and large families.

The net effect of this sharply imposed situation was to inscribe sexual control as the primary practical *content* of religion along with ethnic and political identification, and to construct a situation where the long-delayed farm inheritor (after the father had retired) was able to do so at the expense of their siblings who acquired religious vocations defending the arrangement, became "relatives assisting" on their brother's farm, or were

forced into emigration. Both in this broader situation and in the sharper carceral complex, the property relations of Irish life were inscribed on the bodies and psyches of the losers.

The "lost revolution" of the 1970s

A shift in hegemonic relations came from above, with the Lemass - Whitaker shift to foreign direct investment in the late 1950s, followed at some distance by the feminist challenge to religious and gendered power structures, union struggles and the massive local assertions of urban working-class communities in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the ecological confrontation with developmentalism at Carnsore and the political experiments chronicled in the early chapters of Hanley and Millar (2009) - all of these of course in their own ways after-effects of the Whitaker shift. This broke the localist, religious and mobilising aspects of earlier state policy - but these movements were also pushing on an open door in terms of the newly hegemonic, post-Whitaker alliance.

Their cultural radicalism came in for severe resistance because of fears that it might fragment the broader "national-popular" consensus on which the power of the neo-liberal modernisers ultimately rested, but elites were eventually able to abandon the alliance with the church in favour of offering limited policy gains (and, crucially, funding) to the women's, gay and lesbian, environmental and community movements while ex-activists came to take positions of respectability in the liberal wings of mainstream political parties, in certain parts of academia and the media and in state committees.

Irish social partnership thus comes to seem less a late outlier from the continental pattern of *Keynesian* neo-corporatism and rather a kind of holding pattern parallel to the limited "democratisations" of Latin American states post-dictatorship: a national agreement not to rock the boat and to seek class harmony in the "national interest". It was in some ways a "passive revolution" taming these movements in the aftermath of a series of successful struggles - most obviously the election of Mary Robinson as a symbolic alternative (it is hard to remember) to the provincial conservatism of the real power-holders. From this point on, previously radical "outsider movements" found themselves having to curry favour with precisely the kind of petty-minded, provincial bureaucrats who had always opposed them, in order to gain or retain funding - funding which entailed a retreat from radical politics as a more or less explicit condition of being granted.

While this period created scope for the development of radical movements outside this consensus, their mobilising power was substantially constrained by the broader pattern of

co-optation. The attack on partnership from above, and subsequent recession, is in the process of creating a strange new movement landscape. On the one hand, NGO and union leaderships are keen to retain elements of partnership at any cost, in a dog-eat-dog process shaped by the dependence of professional elites on state funding for survival. On the other hand, radical forces are finding that the attack from above on the earlier hegemony creates scope for enlargement, but in a situation where they lack the organisational capacity to make the necessary connections.

In the broadest sense, a Gramscian analysis should seek to grasp the peculiarity of Ireland as at one and the same time “conservative province” - like Bavaria or northeast Italy, a party system consistently skewed far to the right and closely tied to religious and rural conservatism - and at the same time capable of achievements like the destruction of an aristocratic land-holding system by popular direct action; the breaking-apart of the core state of the world’s then-largest empire; and the defeat of nuclear power. It needs to do so by showing that the hegemonic relations constructed in the national process are not simply repressive but also involve widespread co-optation and offers to (partially) meet some of the needs expressed by social movements.

Gramsci on Dame Street?¹⁰

Because of the experience sketched out above, it is no surprise that recent years have seen many simulated coalitions between social movements which in fact have consisted of events geared towards publicity, lobbying or funding (in other words aimed at elites) driven by organisational leaderships themselves heavily involved in social partnership and dependent on state funding. Thus the Wheel, explicitly constructed around social partnership (to the exclusion of movements substantially challenging state policy), received a range of material support from IBEC, and had no shame about this. The leadership of Is Féidir Linn and subsequently of Claiming Our Future have close links to the Labour Party; and so on (see CEESA 2010 for an extended comment on the politics of the latter).

Activists who attended such events reported tables packed with bureaucrats who were horrified at the thought of street protests. The only serious purpose of such exercises, once conflict or even stepping outside the committee room has been ruled out of court, is to

¹⁰ This section draws on arguments and analyses developed further in Cox (2011c).

attempt to secure threatened funding and lobbying power by manipulating the wider movement into believing that more serious social change is being sought.¹¹ If real social change is possible in this moment of economic and political crisis, where might it come from?

One possibility is certainly that of the Occupy movement developing into an Irish M-15, Icelandic or Tahrir Square experience of mass popular mobilisation against failed elites. This is not impossible - but it is important to note that unlike Iceland and Tahrir Square, M-15 has not as yet led to any substantial change outside itself, and Spain seems set to elect a right-wing government in place of the failed centre-left one. For such a situation to produce real change, Labour and Fine Gael would have to lose all credibility in the way Icelandic politicians and Mubarak did. This is possible, but the experience of Latin America suggests that it will take some years before the slow privatisation of public assets, imposition of austerity politics, economic decline and so on *of themselves* produce a critical mass of popular resistance.

Something more is needed: certainly the radical-democratic experience of mass mobilisation, but also the generalisation of struggle from public space to the compartmentalised worlds of workplace and school, family and church - and a serious settling of accounts with past responsibilities for collusion in corrupt politics and abusive institutions. This may seem impossible, but Ireland is a funny place in terms of social movements. The fear of seeming strange or different means that often movements have to trundle along as minority affairs for years - until apparently all at once those who don't want to stand out jump the same way (and then often deny that they ever felt any differently).

A second, more depressing possibility is that Ireland may follow the East European and post-Soviet model of substantial *de*-mobilisation. In both contexts, authoritarian power structures claimed to speak for the mass of the people; in both contexts, top-down education provided effective socialisation into national culture and ineffective preparation for thinking for yourself. In Eastern Europe, following the uprisings of 1989 - 90, the largest popular movements are routinely far-right ones, with most of the population continuing a pre-1989 mode of passivity. I do not think this outcome is very likely here; but

¹¹ I leave aside the proposition that constitutional tinkering can introduce change by stealth without needing to confront actual power relations, which only confirms Ursula Le Guin's witticism that a liberal is someone for whom the means justify the end.

we should not discount the possibility that (as Inglis 1998 intimates) many Irish people have moved from an unthinking loyalty to the church to an unthinking loyalty to consumerism - or that the long-term result of the Leaving Cert is precisely an inability to organise your way out of a wet paper bag.

Gramsci in Mayo

Returning to Mayo, my third and perhaps most likely scenario is that (as in Latin America over the past ten years) it is the direct confrontation with specific nexuses of power relations which is most likely to prove a strategic source of change. In the broader context, of course we are seeing a massive crisis of neoliberalism precisely in its ability to offer leadership on its home terrain of financial and economic policy; a crisis of US hegemony most clearly visible in the collapse of the “war on terror”, the detachment of much of South America and the inability to control events in its Middle Eastern client states - but as in the pink tide or the Arab Spring the outcomes of crises are shaped by national specifics (the universal *is* the particular, to coin a phrase). The different crises of neoliberalism in Iceland, Greece and Spain show this neatly: what potential for its opponents in Ireland?

I have argued elsewhere (Cox 2011b) that we have to see Rossport as the key strategic struggle of contemporary Ireland. My reason for saying this is threefold: firstly, that as in Andean contexts these kinds of extractive struggles (and we are now starting to see their generalisation, with the rise of campaigns in Donegal and Leitrim, the allocation of further oil and gas blocks and the discovery of the Dalkey oil field) routinely put people with their backs to the wall - and it is especially this kind of conflict over externally-driven development in rural Ireland, as Tovey (1993) and Robert Allen (2004) have chronicled, which has led to the longest and often most successful struggles.

The struggle in Erris has been remarkably successful as such campaigns (pitting tiny populations against the world’s largest companies and the full force of the state and private security firms) go, with the pipeline still not built 11 years on and the project now nearly 4 times over budget (€3 billion, excluding the costs of police and military deployment, as against a projected €800 million). If it is ever completed (and it is not a foregone conclusion), it may be the kind of Pyrrhic victory, like struggles over nuclear power plants in western Europe or the British government’s 1990s roads programme, after which further projects are quietly shelved.

Secondly, the struggle in Erris has generated a truly wide-ranging alliance, combining local fishing and farming populations with radical ecologists, trade unionists, socialists, nationalists, intellectuals and international solidarity - and one which despite its difficulties has been far less fraught than most such alliances (compare the case of the three separate campaigns against the Carnsore Point nuclear reactor: Dalby 1984).

Alliances like these are not easily defeated - and bring together many of the key actors who will need to work together in any substantial overthrow of neoliberal hegemony in Ireland.

Thirdly, at the present juncture the broader issue of popular control of gas and oil resources - in the context of economic crisis brought about by unchecked neoliberalism and corrupt speculation and austerity budgets for the benefit of bondholders and loyalty to the financial markets - is one which affects very wide sections of Irish society indeed, if the argument can be made. Indeed the attempt to put "Rossport" beyond the pale of public discussion, through anti-republicanism and the deployment of state violence, runs the risk of undermining itself in the present situation: if people come to see just *how* morally corrupt the neoliberal state is in this context they find themselves in a much more radical space politically than they might have had it been one issue among many.

Be that as it may, the argument that we should take control of our own oil and gas to rescue a wrecked economy is not a difficult one to make, however much the hired mouths of politicians, journalists and "experts" tell us it is impossible. It is potentially a very welcome one for families facing financial ruin for the sake of Anglo-Irish, Fianna Fáil's pet speculators, our EU / IMF masters and the mysterious bondholders. Win the argument on oil and gas - not in the specialist arena but in public debate - and the whole edifice comes tumbling down (and with it, incidentally, those hired mouths who have no other hymnsheet from which to sing).

Make *these* links - between Erris and austerity, between Occupy and Shell to Sea, and between all of these and the communities and workplaces which are suffering most from the crisis - and a real change in the structure of power in Irish society is possible. There are strong structural barriers, not least within the leaderships of movement organisations tied to social partnership, funding, lobbying and respectability. But one of the features of the crisis has been the state's own attack on these, with austerity meaning there is less and less to offer by way of funds (a range of mildly liberal concessions are being made to plug the gap). Change *within* movements, and within organisations, has to be part and parcel of this process, which cannot be simply a "popular front from above" - which would land us

back in the world where in the last instance loyalty goes to respectability, partnership, and party affiliation. I think this change is possible - and that it may even be on its way.

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