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A Reactionary Dimension in Progressive Revolutionary Theories?

The Case of James Connolly's Socialism Founded on the Re-Conversion of Ireland to the Celtic System of Common Ownership

Olivier Coquelin

The terms “reaction” and “reactionary” were coined during the French Revolution to describe those conservative groups and individuals opposed to the progressive¹ tenets of the revolutionaries, who looked back nostalgically to the traditional rules of the *Ancien Régime*.² According to the political theorist Andrew Heywood, both terms have since been mainly used to refer to three different expressions of conservative thought: opposition to any change or innovation so as to preserve the existing order in the name of traditions and customs inherited from the past; desire to reform the existing order so as to protect it from destruction; desire to change or destroy the existing order so as to restore the vestiges of a prestigious past.³ While the first two features are generally viewed as moderate forms of reactionary politics, the latter takes on a more radical hue to the point of being sometimes of a revolutionary nature—as in the school of thought known as the “conservative revolution” launched by

¹ The term “progressive,” as employed in this article, refers to any theory or doctrine advocating human progress in all areas of life, notably through emphasis on social equality and individual freedom, as opposed to a conservative thought, which sees social inequality as the natural and eternal condition of humanity.

² For a brief history of the terms “reaction” and “reactionary,” see, for example, Albert O. Hirschmann, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 1–10.

³ Each of these three premises is developed respectively in some of the writings of such conservative thinkers as Michael Oakeshott (1901-90), Edmund Burke (1729-97), and Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821).

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German intellectuals in 1918 in order to re-establish the position of spiritual and political leadership held by Germany in Europe at the time of the medieval Holy Roman Empire.⁴

However, if credence is given to one of the commonest definitions of the concept of revolution, understood as a dramatic break from any existing order “to bring about something altogether new,” to quote Hannah Arendt,⁵ one may wonder whether the above-mentioned radical reactionaries are genuine revolutionaries. Since their intentions are inspired by ancient paradigms, they cannot be perceived as “altogether new,” but merely new as regards the present system. If such is not the case, does this mean that only radical progressive theories or movements—some of them adopting the slogan “of the past let us wipe the slate clean”⁶—can be described as authentically revolutionary? This is disputable, to say the least, because any thorough analysis of those radical progressive theories—at least from the 18th century—will reveal some elements celebrating a bygone mythical and glorious past which is used as a vindication of any movement or struggle for the establishment of a new order or society. For example, certain 18th century English reformers and radicals extolled the restoration of the ancient Anglo-Saxon democracy;⁷

⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideas and Concepts: An Introduction* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1994), 285–93. For a detailed analysis of the conservative revolutionary movement in Germany, see for example Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, orig. 1963), 21.

⁶ Line of the famous song called the *Internationale* which was originally written and composed in France in the latter half of the 19th century, and has since been widely sung throughout the world by many radical and revolutionary activists and sympathizers, including the communists, the anarchists, the socialists, and the social democrats.

⁷ Among the key figures of 18th century English radicalism adhering to the notion of lost Anglo-Saxon democracy was John Cartwright (1740-1824). His proposals, as expressed in his 1776 pamphlet *Take Your Choice*, prefigured the Chartist programme of the late 1830s and the 1840s, notably through his advocacy of annual parliaments, the secret ballot, and universal male suffrage. On this topic,

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certain 19th century socialists and communists were inspired by classless primitive societies—including ancient Celtic societies—based on common ownership of land;⁸ the contemporary anarcho-primitivists are advocating a return to the egalitarian ways of life of primitive societies;⁹ etc.

Hence, one may ask the following questions: To what extent are progressive revolutionary theories imbued with a reactionary dimension? Can the oxymoron “progressive reactionary” be used as opposed to conservative reactionaries? In this case, wouldn’t the dialectical divide between progressive and conservative be more pertinently employed than that between progressive and reactionary? In an attempt to answer the above questions, this article will explore some aspects of the revolutionary theories drawn up by the Irish historical figure, James Connolly (1868-1916), whose socialism¹⁰ was based on the idea of re-converting Ireland to the Celtic system of common ownership. In so doing it will not fail to

see, for example, Edward Royle and James Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers, 1760-1848* (Lexington, Massachusetts: University Press of Kentucky, 1982).

⁸ This category encompasses in particular the Marxists, as we shall see below.

⁹ At the root of anarcho-primitivism was a castigation of civilization and its concomitant destructive effects on nature and humanity, as opposed to the more environmentally-friendly, peaceful and egalitarian pre-civilized period. One of the major figures of the anarcho-primitivist movement is the American philosopher, John Zerzan (1943-), who in 2005 edited a collection of essays written by radical thinkers, including Henry David Thoreau, Charles Fourier, William Morris, Ivan Illich, Fredy Perlman, etc., whose ideas had greatly inspired anarcho-primitivism from the 1970s. See John Zerzan, ed., *Against Civilization: Readings and Reflections* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2005). For a more comprehensive approach to anarcho-primitivism, see the essay written by the British anarchist author, John Moore (1957-2002) entitled “A Primitivist Primer: What is Anarcho-Primitivism?” Available from Eco-Action–Ecological Direct Action <<http://www.eco-action.org/dt/primer.html>> (accessed 15 September, 2008).

¹⁰ “Socialism” is used in this article as a generic term to refer to the various theories conceived in the 19th century and advocating collective ownership and management of the means of production, capital, land, property, etc., in the interest of the community as a whole. It is worth noting here that in the Marxist theory of historical materialism socialism also represents the transitional stage between capitalism and communism.

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separate myth from reality as for Connolly's use of Celtic Ireland in the theoretical expression of his progressive revolutionary designs.

James Connolly was born in 1868 in Edinburgh (Scotland) of Irish parents. Sharing the same miserable living conditions as most Irish immigrants in Edinburgh, from the age of ten Connolly was compelled to hold a number of unskilled jobs to supplement the meagre income of his family. When he was fourteen, he joined the British army. As a soldier, he spent a few years in Ireland, where he supposedly developed strong patriotic feelings towards the land of his parents and ancestors. In 1889, he deserted the army, returned to Scotland and married his fiancée, Lillie Reynolds, the following year. The young couple took up residence in Edinburgh. During these Scottish years Connolly became active in socialist politics and trade-union affairs. He became a cobbler in 1895, but his business suffered because he was more interested in politics than in profits. As a result, in May 1896 he emigrated to Dublin, where he was hired as a paid organiser of the Dublin Socialist Club, which was shortly afterwards renamed as the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP). Financial difficulties forced him to move once more. He reached the United States in 1903 and became a member of Daniel De Leon's Socialist Labor Party (SLP), the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and Eugene Debs' Socialist Party of America (SPA). Upon his return to Ireland in 1910, he joined the Irish Socialist Party and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) founded by James Larkin in 1908. In July 1911, he was made the secretary and organiser of the Transport Union in Belfast. He conscientiously carried out his duties during the 1913 Dublin Lock-Out, and in October 1914 was elected the head of the ITGWU and of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA). The latter was a paramilitary body created in the middle of the Dublin great industrial dispute of 1913 to protect strikers against police brutality. From 1915 onwards, under Connolly's leadership, the Citizen Army was involved into the struggle for national independence. Consequently, Connolly agreed to act in conjunction with the Military Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in January 1916, thereby allying his minute Citizen Army with the nationalist militia, known as the Irish Volunteers and ruled by the revolutionary IRB. As a member of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic, Connolly was one of the

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main architects of the abortive Easter Rising of 1916 during which he was seriously wounded. Forced to surrender with the other surviving rebels, after a week of street fighting in Dublin against the British troops, he was court-martialled and executed by a firing squad in May 1916, thus following fifteen other rebel leaders to the grave.¹¹

While Connolly was undoubtedly a man of action dedicated to the achievement of his dearest ideals, he could also be described as a genuine thinker. Despite the fact that he left school at the age of ten, life granted him opportunities to educate himself. His determination to raise his intellectual level eventually bore fruit, as he became recognized as a historian, an economist, a journalist, a songwriter, a poet, and a playwright. But it was above all his political writings that brought him fame as a non-doctrinaire Marxist theoretician. Indeed, originating from an Irish background firmly attached to the Motherland's destiny, Connolly was not insensitive to Irish national demands, which he tailored to his Marxist-inspired thinking, as in the following passage he wrote in 1896:

The struggle for Irish freedom has two aspects: it is national and social. Its national ideal can never be realized until Ireland stands forth before the world a nation free and independent. It is social and economic; because no matter what the form of government may be, as long as one class owns as their private property the land and instruments of labor, from which all mankind derive their subsistence, that class will always have it in their power to plunder and enslave the remainder of their fellow-creatures.¹²

¹¹ It is interesting to note here that since 1920 James Connolly has been the subject of numerous biographical essays. The latest one, published in 2005, was the work of the former General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Donal Nevin. See Donal Nevin, *James Connolly: A Full Life* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005).

¹² James Connolly, "Irish Socialist Republic: To the Irish People (issued in 1896 and republished in March 1908 in *The Harp*)", in *James Connolly: The Lost Writings* ed. Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 98.

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But Connolly's Marxist approach to Irish history also led him to draw his theoretical inspiration from the ideals of primitive communism¹³ which had supposedly survived in Celtic Ireland until the mid-seventeenth century. Thus, guided notably by the research of such a prominent 19th century anthropologist as Lewis Morgan (1818-81), he asserted as early as 1897 that "Nationalism without Socialism - without a reorganisation of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of that common property which underlay the social structure of Ancient Erin - is only national recreancy."¹⁴ The assumption that socialism was "the modern application of the social principle which underla[id] the Brehon laws,"¹⁵ often recurred in Connolly's work, but was first somewhat theorized in his 1897 pamphlet entitled *Erin's Hope: The End and the Means*, in which he tried to demonstrate, among other things, that in the 17th century the English government imposed on Ireland a social order which had been previously unknown in Ireland, namely feudalism. For, before this dramatic change occurred, the Celtic system of clan or common ownership had been based on the democratic principle that property belonged to the community and was subservient to the interests of the people. An Irish system that was, to quote Connolly's own words, "on a par with those conceptions of social rights and duties which we find the ruling classes to-day denouncing so fiercely as 'Socialistic.'"¹⁶ When the English rulers realized that the national subjection of Ireland could not be achieved as long as the politically subjected nation remained economically free, they strove to overcome this obstacle by instituting the lands of the tribe as the private property of the chief. As a result, the chief

¹³ The term "communism," as used in the present study, refers to egalitarian, stateless and classless societies in which the means of production and property are owned and managed in common.

¹⁴ James Connolly, "Socialism and Nationalism," in James Connolly, *Collected Works, Vol. I* (Dublin: New Books Publications, 1987), 307.

¹⁵ *The Workers' Republic*, 13 August, 1898. Quoted in R.M. Fox, *James Connolly: the Forerunner* (Tralee: Kerryman Press, 1946), 46; Kieran Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 36.

¹⁶ James Connolly, *Erin's Hope: the End and the Means* (Dublin: New Books Publications, 1972, orig. 1897), 8.

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was constrained to relinquish his Irish title, the symbol of a free election, to an English title, such as duke or earl, in accordance with a “thoroughly individualistic” English civilization. Thus emerged Irish landowners who adhered to a new social order against which their forefathers had struggled until the break-up of the Kilkenny Confederation¹⁷ in 1649 when the clans were dispersed. And to eradicate “a social system abhorrent to the best traditions of a Celtic people,”¹⁸ Connolly argued that the Irish nation could not rely on a native bourgeoisie which was inclined to treason, contrary to the working class which, “in emancipating [themselves] (...) must, perforce, free [their] country.”¹⁹ He also advocated the establishment of a socialist republic in such a way as to abolish “the dread of foreign competition and render perfectly needless any attempt to create an industrial hell in Ireland.”²⁰ Irish agricultural production, henceforward democratically managed, would be used first to feed the people and, when needed, to purchase the manufactured goods produced only abroad. Connolly underscored the importance of the Irish workers as the true inheritors of the ancient Celtic social traditions to fight independently of a propertied class, which would most probably be inclined to defend the socio-economic *status quo* in a politically emancipated Ireland.²¹

This essay laid the foundations for what was to become thirteen years later Connolly’s major work, namely *Labour in Irish History*, in which he blatantly pronounced himself to be in favour of “the re-

¹⁷ The “Kilkenny Confederation” was founded in 1642 as a result of the rebellion launched the previous year by Irish Catholic gentry to deter any invasion of the country by visceral anti-Catholic English Long Parliament and Scottish Covenanters. The Kilkenny Confederation was to control most of the Irish territory and to join forces with a royalist coalition against the “Rump Parliament” in 1648. The following year, the Confederation led by Owen Roe O’Neill (1590-1649) was finally defeated by Oliver Cromwell’s New Model Army. The defeat completed the conquest of Ireland by England initiated in the latter half of the 12th century. For a detailed study of the Kilkenny Confederation, see, for example, Pádraig Lenihan, *Confederate Catholics at War, 1641-49* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ Connolly, *EHEM*, 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5–23.

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conversion of Ireland to the Gaelic principle of common ownership by a people of their source of food and maintenance.”²² Connolly’s Ireland, therefore, was imbued with “the Gaelic ideas of equality and democracy,” extirpated from the mid-seventeenth century in an effort to instil in the minds of the Irish people “feudal ideas of the divine right of kings to rule, and of subjects to unquestionably obey.”²³

But how relevant were Connolly’s assumptions in relation to the historical facts? Since his death in 1916, most comprehensive studies have actually somewhat contradicted Connolly’s belief that a primitive form of communism based on common ownership of land had prevailed in Ireland until the demise of the Gaelic culture and civilization in the mid-seventeenth century. Thus, for example, in his 1921 *Celtic Ireland*, the eminent scholar of Irish history Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945) firmly emphasized that no documents offered any conclusive evidence as to the collective nature of the lands owned by the tribe (*túath*), and in so doing agreed wholeheartedly with what Sir Henry Maine (1822-88) had already alluded several decades before when writing that “all the Brehon writers seem (...) to have a bias towards private (...), as distinguished from collective, property”.²⁴ This assertion has been more or less explicitly confirmed in more recent surveys and research works by, among others, D.A. Binchy, Gearóid Mac Niocaill, Kenneth Nicholls, Joseph Peden, Fergus Kelly, and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín.²⁵ These studies suggest that the term

²² James Connolly, “Labour in Irish History”, in Connolly, *CW*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁴ See Sir Henry Sumner Maine, *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions*, 7th edition (London: John Murray, 1914, orig. 1874), 105. See also Eoin MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland* (Dublin: Academic Press, 1981, orig. 1921), 146.

²⁵ See notably D.A. Binchy, “Secular Institutions”, in *Early Irish Society* ed. Myles Dillon, 52–65 (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1954); Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), 42–70; Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2003, orig. 1972), 22–147; Joseph R. Peden, “Property Rights in Celtic Irish Law”, *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 1(2) (1977): 81–95; Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2005, orig. 1988); Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), 63–146.

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“communism” used by Connolly to designate the socio-economic structure of Gaelic Ireland is inappropriate for two major reasons: first, because Gaelic society was highly hierarchical and aristocratic; and second, because private ownership of assets, including lands and cattle, was a determining factor for a man’s status and grade in Gaelic society.

Thus, prior to the Norman invasion in the latter half of the 12th century, the population of Celtic Ireland was legally divided into two main categories: the “free” (*sóer*) who were *de jure* members of the assembly of the basic political unit of Celtic Ireland, namely the *túath*, in which, among other things, the king (*rí*) was elected;²⁶ and the “unfree” (*dóer*) who were barred from these assemblies. The free men actually comprised all the landowners, including the kings, noblemen (*flaith*), and commoners (*ócaire* and *bóaire*), themselves subdivided into various social strata depending on the amount of assets and the number of clients each free man in his respective class possessed. In addition to the landowners, other prominent figures of Gaelic society belonged to the category of free men: the poets (*fili*), the musicians—the most prominent of them being the harpists (*cruit*)—the lawyers (*brithem* and *aighe*), the clergymen—among whom were the monks (*manach*), the priests (*sacerdos*), and the abbots (*abb*)—the physicians (*liaig* or *midach*), and the skilled craftsmen—more precisely the wood craftsmen (*sáer*), the blacksmiths (*gobae*), the silversmiths (*cerd*), and the coppersmiths (*umaige*). The “unfree” class, for its part, encompassed all the landless men among whom were the outlaws, the tenants at will (*bothach* and *fuidir*), the serfs (*sen-chléithe*), and the “male” and “female” slaves (*mug* and *cumal*).²⁷ This means that elements of chattel slavery and feudalism were present in Gaelic society, and it was a feudal system which during the five centuries long conquest

²⁶ However, some historians argue that the free commoners, although members of the assembly of the *túath*, were nonetheless excluded from the process of electing a new king, an electoral process which therefore would have been the exclusive prerogative of the noblemen. Such a statement was made, for example, by D. Blair Gibson (El Camino College, USA) in his paper entitled, “Celtic Democracy: Appreciating the Role Played by Alliances and Elections in Celtic Political Systems” presented at the 28th Annual Harvard Celtic Colloquium, on October 11, 2008.

²⁷ For a concise description of the social structure of Gaelic Ireland, see Kelly, 7–98.

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of Ireland by England (from the 12th to the 17th century) was to be gradually implemented in lieu of the socio-political order governed by Brehon laws, which nonetheless underwent endemic revival between the 13th and the 16th century.²⁸

Obviously all these parameters ran counter to Connolly's theory of an egalitarian and democratic Celtic Ireland. However, some aspects of communal property and organization really had a legal existence in Gaelic Ireland, as the non-privately owned woodlands and mountain peaks used equally by all members of the *túath*, or the kin-group (*fine*) which, to quote Gearóid Mac Niocaill, "in some respects (...) often acted as a kind of cooperative,"²⁹ in the form of arrangements between kinsmen for joint-ownership, joint-tenancy and joint-farming (including joint-ploughing and joint-pasturing), and of collective decisions made by the members of the *derb-fine*³⁰ as regards land affairs.³¹ Moreover, Gaelic society contained some indisputable "progressive" or "liberal," not to say "libertarian"³² tendencies (at least by modern standards and if compared with feudal England and Europe), particularly in regard to such issues as women's land and property rights, marriage and sexual life, contractual relationships, social mobility, criminality, etc.³³

²⁸ Nicholls, 3–58, 151–210; Ó Cróinín, 110–124.

²⁹ Mac Niocaill, 51.

³⁰ The *derb-fine* was a kin-group whose male members descended from a common great grandfather.

³¹ For example, the "kin-land" could not be sold and alienated without the consent of all the male members of the *derb-fine*.

³² See, for example, Joseph R. Peden, "Stateless Societies: Ancient Ireland", *The Libertarian Forum* (April 1971): 3–4, 8.

³³ As regards Irish women, despite the fundamentally patriarchal nature of Gaelic society, they nonetheless enjoyed rights that were denied to their counterparts by most legal systems in Christian Europe. For example, in the case when a man had no male offspring, his daughter(s) could inherit his land and property, and managed the full production of it. The Brehon laws also allowed women to divorce their husbands in certain circumstances (sexual dissatisfaction, ill-treatment, abandonment, etc.). On the "socialistic" and "progressive" aspects of Gaelic Ireland, see Kelly, 11–12, 68–91, 99–109, 214–224; Ó Cróinín, 125–146;

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One may also argue in Connolly's defence that, as Joseph Peden points out, the original translations of the old Irish law tracts carried out by Eugene O'Curry (1794-1862) and John O'Donovan (1806-61) and published between 1864 and 1901 were filled with errors and inaccuracies which undoubtedly misled many otherwise competent and influential historians, such as Patrick Joyce (1827-1914) in his 1906 *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, or Prosper Boissonnade (1862-1935) who, in his 1921 *Life and Work in Medieval Europe*, asserted notably that:

The soil of Ireland (belonging) to 184 tribes or clans (...) the clans held the land in common (...) no man held individual property save his household goods, and each held only the right of usufruct over his strip of tribal domain (...) in each district of Ireland the free population lived communistically in immense wooden buildings (...) they lived and fed in common, seated on long benches, and all the families of the district slept there upon beds of reeds...³⁴

In fact, only the philological explorations of the old Irish texts by leading Celticists, including Eoin MacNeill, were to give rise to different interpretations of Gaelic Ireland.³⁵ Hence, it is clear that Connolly has been unjustly charged by at least one of his biographers with having idealized the social organisation of ancient and medieval Ireland, an idealization purportedly deriving from "an uncritical reading of the Brehon laws."³⁶ As distinct from this assumption, other commentators have suggested that Connolly's use of Celtic Ireland was rather intended to dissociate the Irish Labour movement from a condescending and dogmatic British counterpart through the revival of what Connolly

Nicholls, 59–64, 83–87; Mac Niocaill, 49–56, 66–67.

³⁴ Quoted in Peden, "PRCIL", 81–82. See also Prosper Boissonnade, *Life and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York: Harper Torch, 1964, orig. 1921), 78–79. Boissonnade's book was first published in French in 1921 under the title of *Le Travail dans l'Europe Chrétienne au Moyen Age*; it was first translated into English by Eileen Power in 1927.

³⁵ Peden, *ibid.*, 81–82.

³⁶ See Allen, 35–40.

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perceived as symbols, myths and memories of a genuine past likely to be combined with contemporary socialist political issues in a revolutionary attempt to overthrow a social system resulting from a rupture produced by the colonial process. Connolly's revolutionary scheme actually disregarded the orthodox Marxist concept of development stages, especially the stage of industrial modernization, which was seen as an offspring of capitalism. His idea, instead, was to modernize and democratise an essentially agricultural Ireland in a process inspired by ancient Celtic paradigms which had undergone over two centuries of near extinction.³⁷ Thus, the reactionary element in Connolly's revolutionary theories and designs is also implicitly highlighted by this alternative interpretation.

It is therefore in his ambition to re-convert Ireland to an indisputable *mythical* Celtic system of common ownership that one can see that Connolly's progressive revolutionary theories encompassed a reactionary dimension in line with a Marxist tradition to which he belonged (even though he was non-dogmatic). That reactionary dimension in Marxist thought was implicitly expressed by Friedrich Engels in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1884. Using Lewis Morgan's anthropological methodology, Engels (1820-95) argued that in the successive stages of human progress the three main modes of production characteristic of the civilized period, namely slavery, feudalism and capitalism, were responsible for the evils suffered by the vast majority of human beings exploited by a ruling class closely associated with the development of the State. By contrast, in the preceding stages of savagery and barbarism, "production was essentially collective, just as consumption proceeded by direct distribution of the products within larger or smaller communistic communities." Stateless

³⁷ David Lloyd, "Rethinking National Marxism: James Connolly and 'Celtic Communism'", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 5(3) (Nov. 2003): 345–370; David Lloyd, "Why Read Connolly?", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 10(1) (2008): 116–123; Jonathan Githens-Mazer, "Ancient Erin, Modern Socialism: Myths, Memories and Symbols of the Irish Nation in the Writings of James Connolly", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 10(1) (2008): 86–101.

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“communistic communities” which, as Connolly was also to assert later, had survived in the particular case of Ireland until the seventeenth century when the English jurists “were sent over to transform the clan lands into domains of the English crown.” Civilization as a modern phenomenon based on the exploitation of man by man, consequently, had to be eradicated through a revolution aimed at the resurgence and modernization of the principles and production relations prevailing in the preceding eras. And, to support and conclude his argument, Engels cited Lewis Morgan who had written in reference to civilization:

Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a *revival*, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the *ancient gentes*.³⁸

Hence, the basically reactionary character underpinning the Marxist theory of historical materialism reveals itself in the attention given to the successive modes of production which it identifies in human history, ranging from primitive to “modern” communism, and including slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. The fundamental difference with the traditional reactionaries, accordingly, lies in the ideological nature of their respective revolutionary aims: conservative and elitist for the traditional right-wing reactionaries, progressive and egalitarian for the Marxist-oriented reactionaries. It remains to be seen, as part of a future study, to what extent the other modern and contemporary progressive revolutionary theories of those notably mentioned in the introduction to this article may be described as reactionary.

³⁸ My italics. See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Hottingen-Zurich: 1884).

Available from the Marxists Internet Archive (MIA, <http://marx.org/>) <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm>> (accessed September 24, 2008).