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Abstract:

The division of contemporary Ireland into two distinct entities was the result of the 1916-1923 Revolution, which was fought by Irish nationalists for the political independence of the island. Although the revolutionary activity was primarily dedicated to political purposes, Ireland underwent considerable social turmoil at that time, in both industrial and agrarian fields. But while the socioeconomic dimension of the Irish revolution has received academic recognition for several decades, many historians have nonetheless tended to downplay its historical significance. This not least because it did not give rise to any radical social change in the new Irish Free State, despite the emergence of an alternative organizational method, named "soviet" after the council movement that sprang up in the 1917 Russian Revolution. The present article, therefore, sets out to somewhat qualify the relevance of such analysis. In so doing, it will determine to what extent the resort to the self-managed soviets was the expression of what Ernest Bloch defined as "utopian impulse", how the latter impacted the Irish revolutionary movement, and why it was eventually stifled, thus contributing to the establishment of a conservative state in Independent Ireland.

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The division of present-day Ireland into two distinct entities dates from the historical period known as the 1916-23 Irish Revolution, in which Irish nationalists, represented by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin, fought for the political independence of the island. However, although the revolutionary activity was primarily devoted to political purposes—so as to federate the cross-class nationalist community around the supreme goal of Irish independence—, a substantial amount of social unrest, whether industrial or agrarian, swept through the country, especially from 1917 onwards. The significant growing demand for food products and raw materials engendered by the war effort actually paved the way for an unprecedented wave of wage strikes launched by industrial workers and farm laborers alike. But social turmoil also included boycott, cattle driving and land seizures perpetrated by the small holders and landless laborers who had not substantially benefited from the various land reforms implemented since 1903. Concurrent with these traditional styles and patterns of conflict emerged an alternative organizational method, referred to as "soviet" after the council movement that developed as part of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Initially established as auxiliaries within the wages movement—and even the independence movement—, the one hundred or so Irish soviets nonetheless differed from the latter in two aspects: their action did not rest upon work stoppage but on the continuity of production or management carried out exclusively by the workers themselves, not without having first ousted or ignored the official owners, managers or rulers. It is therefore through this practice of workers' self-management in their midst that the Irish soviets can be regarded as genuine subversive experiments—comparable to those Russian factory committees which took over their plants and ran them independently of the owners and managers.[1]

Starting from the premise that the ideologies, whether temporal or spiritual, best characterizing Independent Ireland in late modern history have been nationalism, conservatism and Catholicism, one can hardly disagree with Charles Townshend, the eminent historian, when he uses the phrase "exotic manifestations" to refer to the above-mentioned soviets established as a counterpoint to the Irish Revolution, from 1918 to 1923.[2] "Exotic", indeed, for the term "soviet" is generally associated with such doctrines as communism, socialism, and even anarchism, which have never really taken hold in the southern part of Ireland. Paradoxically, however, this historical "exoticism" has hitherto been examined somewhat on the fringe of mainstream academic research,[3] in which socioeconomic issues have been pushed into the background or diluted in political and military studies that have remained dominant.[4] Such approach is usually justified by the fact that the various disputes that took

place in the Irish Revolution did not pave the way for radical social change in the new Irish Free State.[5] However respectable the latter view is, it remains nonetheless disputable given that, in Terence Dooley' own words, "other than acknowledging some contribution of agrarian issues to the revolution, historians have failed to take up the challenge of exploring them in greater detail or, indeed, to be fully convinced or their existence".[6] This remark equally applies to the 1918-23 Irish Soviets, whose comprehensive examination still remains to be carried out.

As part of a project dedicated to the latter, the present article therefore seeks, first, to comprehend the actual motives of those workers who tried to take things a step further, resorting to subversive methods to achieve their goals, and, second, to identify the different factors that contributed to their failure. This will mean dealing with such questions as: were the striking workers imbued with socialist doctrine of any kind? Or were the Irish soviets mere manifestations of what the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch delineated as "utopian impulse"—in this case triggered by the socioeconomic or sociopolitical circumstances of the time? And to what extent was the cause of their final dismantling also to be found in the latter circumstances? But before tackling these issues it seems necessary to define and describe succinctly the concepts of "utopia" and "utopian impulse".

The term "utopia" actually covers two main meanings: a colloquial or pejorative one synonymous with "impossible", "unrealism", "illusion", and "perfection", the latter often being equated with "totalitarianism"; and a more rigorous or theoretical, if not literary sense referring to any speculation on the future with a view to drawing up or setting up a still non-existent better or ideal society removed of the present flaws or dregs. Here utopia is associated with such notions as "possible", "desire", "hope", "imagination", "change", "revolt", "revolution" and the like. However, the former approach has hitherto prevailed over the latter, notably as a means used by the proponents of any mainstream ideology to discredit the ideas or designs of their maverick opponents. Thus it was for the socialist movement through Marxist dominant currents who, in the name of their scientific concept of socialism, branded "utopian" the epigones of such pre-Marxist thinkers as Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and Claude Henri de Saint-Simon—though the latter regarded themselves as social scientists. This explains why orthodox Marxists have always rejected any attempt at speculative construction of the future socialist society—why, for example, the way of achieving concrete "socialization of the means of production" has never been clearly articulated.[7]

Nevertheless, alongside this prevalent trend, a few Marxist thinkers, including William Morris, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, sought to rehabilitate the concept of "utopia", drawing on its theoretical approach that often entails a three-stage process, which is: first, rejection or criticism of the present society or regime; second, desire or hope for a new and better society; and third, development of a

comprehensive scheme for a non-existent alternative society or, in Yolène Dial-Rochereux's own words, "inverted society", understood as "the positive inversion of the negative present".[8] To this can be added a fourth stage in the case of those practical utopias or utopian experiments intended to set up an "inverted society", whether drawn up beforehand or not. This means that utopian practice can also be devoid of predetermined content and be, if anything, the result of spontaneous action, as a pragmatic response to existing social conditions that require transformation. This need or aspiration for radical change resulting from extreme dissatisfaction is actually ingrained in human nature, according to Ernst Bloch. It is consubstantial with what he calls the "utopian impulse",[9] which is ubiquitous and, to quote Vincent Geoghegan, "can be found at all levels of activity: in leisurely dreaming, in the various forms of personal display, in eroticism and art, as well as in the more familiar form of futuristic blueprints. It can of course take the form of mere escape from a hostile world".[10]
In relation to the present topic we may therefore wonder to what extent the Irish soviets fit with this analytical framework. And in so doing, we will focus on three categories of emblematic soviets, each corresponding to a specific goal: the Limerick soviet (urban and socio-political), the Cleeves soviets (industrial and socioeconomic) and the Broadford soviet (agrarian and socioeconomic).

The first soviet that will be explored here, the Limerick soviet, is probably the most famous of all Irish soviets, not least because it received wide press coverage throughout its existence. It lasted for two weeks in April 1919 and was set up by the Limerick Trades' Council, after the city had been proclaimed a "special military area" by the British Army, in response to the escape of a republican and trade unionist prisoner, Robert Byrne, during which he was killed together with a policeman. This coercive measure actually provided for the issuance of permits for all the citizens entering and leaving the city. The general strike launched in protest by the local labor movement was therefore politically motivated, but not without being imbued with a strong social flavor as well, for it was exclusively led by representatives of the working class, with the support of some sections of the middle class, the official Sinn Féin city council and the local Catholic Church. Thus, it was the Trade's Council that, first, elected a strike committee, which soon became known as the "soviet", and then, so as to facilitate the management of the city, appointed subcommittees responsible for propaganda, food, vigilance and finance (besides, in the latter area the soviet even went as far as to issue its own money to compensate for a shortage of financial resources). Their efforts eventually bore fruit as the military authorities suspended martial law on May 6—that is one week after the strike had ended.[11]
What were the Limerick strikers' real motives for taking over their town? Did they merely aim at curbing their deteriorating working conditions due to martial law? Or did they ultimately contemplate creating a new and "inverted" system in place of the existing one? Addressing these issues John O'Callaghan contends that the Limerick soviet was an essentially political-inspired takeover with a

social dimension nevertheless utterly devoid of subversive intentions.[12] Niamh Hehir and Joe Morrissey, for their part, go as far to assert that: "[I]t would be a distortion of historical fact to claim that the Limerick Soviet was proof that Irish workers were thirsting for Socialist revolution in 1919. Essentially, the strike was in defense of civil liberties and when a compromise solution was worked out over the military permit system the Soviet folded up".[13] Dominic Haugh somewhat qualifies the latter assertion, claiming that: "Irrespective of the issue that sparked the Soviet, the reality is that the workers of Limerick reacted with class instincts, immediately organizing their own democratic structures to facilitate the organization of affairs in the city".[14]

But while it seems indeed difficult to determine precisely what each striker ultimately yearned for, on the other hand, one may possibly have an insight into the path the Limerick workers could have taken, under other and more favorable circumstances—especially as the soviet leaders contemplated extending their movement to the whole country. Thus, if their strike was essentially in defense of civil liberties, why, then, did they seek to escalate the Limerick Soviet to a national level? This knowing that the strikers eventually obtained what they had initially fought for, with no national strike in support. Furthermore, why did the Limerick leaders and rank and file feel betrayed by the Irish Trade Union Congress's national executive (ITUC) who had ruled out the idea of a national general strike?[15] Why were some of them so disgusted that they threatened to set up another soviet? Was it because they expected the National Executive to "make Limerick the headquarters of Ireland's national and social revolution", as D. R. O'Connor Lysaght argues?[16] Another possible answer is that they felt extremely frustrated when ordered to resume work as they had demonstrated their ability to run their town's economy both autonomously and effectively. And it is out of this newly acquired self-confidence, that one may think that the Limerick striking workers (who numbered 14,000 out of a population of 38,000 inhabitants) gave a subversive dimension and, by doing so, a "utopian impulse" to their original designs. As, from a spontaneous and pragmatic response to the present state of dissatisfaction, vaguely imbued with syndicalist theory,[17] they now aspired to take a further step forward and spread their "inverted" organizational structure nationwide, as part of a general strike. But this "utopian impulse", as described above, was probably more evident as regards the Cleeves soviets.

Cleeve is actually the name of a family who, at the time of the Irish Revolution, ran a network of some 100 creameries, separation stations, condensed milk factories and mills located in counties Limerick, Tipperary and Cork. About 3,000 people worked for this business empire, which also processed the milk of some 5,000 farmers. From 1918 onwards, Cleeves, like many other Irish companies, went through major social disputes over wages, working hours and conditions, involving the most radical and powerful trade union of the time, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union

(ITGWU), which spearheaded in Ireland the "One Big Union" principle, aimed at organizing the workers as a whole into one big union to achieve working class control of all industries. Fairly soon, however, some of these conflicts were to take the form of factory seizures in which the workers kept their plant running under their control. These workers' self-managed occupations were naturally dubbed "soviets"—in the wake of the Limerick Soviet—, starting with the Knocklong creamery (County Limerick) in May 1920, followed by the Bruree mills and bakery (County Limerick) in August 1921, and 39 creameries, along with mills and other workshops (Counties Limerick, Tipperary and Cork), for several months in 1922.[18]

Why did these workers decide to seize their enterprises and manage them themselves instead of just simply refusing to work? As an explanation for such a phenomenon, some researchers take up the "strike tactic" argument as couched by the *Voice of Labour*, the ITGWU's official organ, as early as 1921.[19] Thus, for example, referring to the Monaghan Asylum soviet led, Donal Ó Drisceoil states that: "As [Desmond] Greaves has pointed out, however, this was not a syndicalist 'take and hold' operation, but a means of taking industrial action without withdrawing labor. It was essentially a strike tactic, though with undeniable political overtones, and in all cases of 'soviets' up to 1921, the employers' property was returned once demands had been met".[20] Regarding the fact that "the employers' property was returned once demands had been met", it must be reminded that in some cases this presumably occurred following negotiations brought about under the threat of the Sinn Féin Government, as in the Bruree Soviet where Constance Markievicz, the then Minister for Labor, would have threatened to dispatch republican soldiers to force the workers to leave the premises peacefully.[21]

As for the Knocklong soviet, while the creamery was handed over to the Cleeve family after a settlement had been reached with them, the rationale that lay behind the workers' action is nonetheless worth mentioning due to its manifest utopian approach. Their grievance essentially rested upon the fact that their wages were far lower than those obtained by their colleagues in other branches of the firm, as a result of strikes or bargaining. After several months of unfruitful negotiations, they eventually embarked on taking control of their plant and running it without the tyrannical official manager, whose dismissal was also demanded. Not only was the takeover used as an alternative to strike action to get satisfaction of their most important claims, but, as reported in *The Irish Times*, "apparently the object of the workmen in seizing the place was [also] to prove that the wages they demanded could be paid out of the profits".[22] Their soviet was therefore a sort of temporary utopian space meant to demonstrate that their demands were valid and could be successfully put into practice notably within the framework of a new and "inverted" form of socioeconomic organization, symbolized here by the raising of the red flag over the factory and, above all, by the replacement of the Cleeves name plate at the entrance with a banner stating: "Knocklong Soviet Creamery, We make butter, not profits". Not to mention the inherently utopian "imagination", as conceptualized by Ernst

Bloch,[23] that the Knocklong soviet aroused in the workers, according to John O'Dwyer, the soviet's assistant manager: "[B]ut the bold stroke by which we established the Soviet has appealed to the imagination of the workers, many of whom, including the women, have since come into our ranks".[24] And, over one year later, such "utopian imagination" was to find expression once again in a soviet established this time in Cleeves' mills and bakery at Bruree, its slogan proclaiming: "Bruree Workers Soviet Mills, We made Bread not Profits". Here, too, the taking over of the concern was brought about by an unsettled dispute, in which the mill workers demanded the reinstatement of two dismissed employees with the payment of full wages for their time spent out of work. But here, the soviet went even further in its utopian intent to reject the past radically and create a better life for the workers themselves and the whole population alike, as was made explicit on the poster displayed at the entrance door: "Bruree Mills and Bakery are now the property of the workers. The mill and shop are open for the sale of bread, flour and meal. It is hoped to reduce prices and do away with profiteering within a day. By order of the workers".[25] But notwithstanding the commercial success it experienced, the Bruree soviet was compelled to cease operations after ten days, apparently under the threat of military intervention uttered by the Sinn Féin government, in compliance with its strategy of cross-class unity—as mentioned above.

However, unlike the soviets set up in the period 1918-21, whose original goals had been achieved, all of the 1922-23 soviets ended in total failure. According to Emmet O'Connor, this can be accounted for by the economic context of each period. Thus, the post-war economic boom created an incentive for the workers to claim their share of the general growth in prosperity. From 1918 to 1921, what was known as the wages movement translated into 782 industrial strikes—as against 307 in the years 1914-1918—, most of them being successful.[26] And when work stoppage or negotiation proved insufficient to achieve expected results, some workers resorted to soviet occupations. But, with the slump of 1921-23, social unrest turned into struggles against wage cuts imposed by the employers and the big farmers. The tide was now turning in favor of the latter, to the extent that, to quote Emmet O'Connor, "labour was … coming close to conceding what had been won since 1914".[27] Such circumstances naturally fostered the resurgence of soviets which, from tactical tools used to complement the wages movement, were henceforth increasingly viewed as genuine alternatives to traditional private property rights. This also means that the utopian impulse grew even more acute in the 1922-23 period—as in the 39 Cleeves' plants taken over in response to a lockout resulting from an unsettled dispute about pay and staff cutbacks. In the latter case, the worker's decision to resume production, despite their employers' intention to shut down the factories, was actually justified on the ground that such closing down would "[imperil] the means of livelihood of 5,000 farmers, [risk] the destruction of national produce to the extent of thousands of pounds a week, and [throw] 3,000

workers and their family out of work, to beg and starve".[28] It was therefore "in the interest of the community, and to preserve the industry for the nation" that the workers were instructed to carry on work. These designs, both communal and national, were encapsulated in their motto, "the Sovereign People".[29] The utopian impulse, embodied in the need to create a perfect life for themselves and the national community, was all the more conspicuous here that, according to the *Voice of Labour*, "these men were straining every nerve to secure perfection in the product they were manufacturing; that no possible slur should be cast upon the Workers' Factory, [in which], the minutest detail failed to escape the keen observation of the Works manager [who was only a worker and] whose fervent enthusiasm and love of his work was a constant urge to the best in every man and woman".[30] Yet this perfect and "inverted" occupation, as portrayed here, proved short-lived due to the joint effect of the farmers' boycott and the intervention of the Free State Army, both being in line with what Emmet O'Connor calls "the conservative response" to social chaos.[31] Not to mention the Irish Labour leaders whose ideological refusal to use subversive methods to carry out their revolutionary goals naturally led them to disown or ignore the soviets showing the slightest sign of subversion, as in the 1922 Cleeves soviets,[32] but also in the Limerick soviet where the leaders considered spreading their movement to the whole country.

Of course, such subversive inclination in the period 1921-23 also affected the rural areas, which witnessed several attempts at implementing collective ownership of land, as in the village of Broadford (County Clare) in 1922, though located in an area with no strong trade union tradition, where the Going estate—after the name of the landlord, James Dennison Going—was run as a soviet for nearly ten months by tenant farmers merely demanding "a reduction in first and second term rents and … distribution of grass lands among the small tenants". To this end, a "Committee of farmers, tenants, workers and Transport Union workers on the Going estates" was formed, with one of its members elected as its secretary. Paradoxical as it might seem, however, the Going estate became self-managed and autonomous, while remaining officially the landlord's private property. This ambiguous situation was marked by the Broadford Committee's decision to pay what it reckoned to be a fair rent for six months, namely 110 £ which was much fewer than the payment expected by the landlord's agent. And they did so until November 1922, when they were compelled to return the estate due to the legal action taken against them, and which extended over more than three years. In addition to this, the Committee or "soviet" endeavored to support the local community in two ways: first, by converting part of the estate into common fields for meadowing; and second, by letting lands for tillage to landless men in Broadford.[33] Other similar "soviet" experiments were also conducted in County Clare in 1922-23—in Toovahera, Kilfenora and Ballyvaughan—, here too by tenant farmers

left on the sidelines of the 1903 and 1909 land reforms,[34] and yearning for a fairer distribution of land and a drastic reduction of rents that they imposed by taking over the estates they worked on.[35]

In the conclusion of his article on the Broadford soviet, Michael McCarthy argues that "it is impossible to say to what extent the genuine spirit of Bolshevism motivated the men of Broadford ... in February 1922".[36] Here the term "spirit of Bolshevism" refers to the revolutionary movement that had swept through Russia and other parts of Europe since February 1917. In this respect, it is important to point out that the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union had also been actively involved in the land agitation since the agrarian outbreak of 1917, thereby organizing tens of thousands of laborers and landless farmers within four years. It was no wonder, therefore, that the trade union participated in the setting up of the Broadford soviet in February 1922—hence "Transport Union" was added to the Committee's title. Thus even though the rank and file of this land soviet—together with that of all the other rural experiments—, whether unionized or not, had not, to quote Conor Kostick, "a full understanding of how a soviet functioned",[37] or, in James Kemmys' own words, "had little socialist ideology", they had most probably been told by their local leaders: first, that the ITGWU was the Irish spearhead of the aforesaid "One Big Union" principle; and second, that the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC)—re-named the Irish Labor Party and Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC)—, to which the ITGWU was affiliated, had openly espoused socialism from November 1918 onwards.[38] Thus, had the striking farm workers, most of whom were devout Catholic, given credence to the frequent anti-socialist messages preached in the churches, they undoubtedly either would not have swelled the ranks of the ITGWU or would have refused to get involved in social unrest alongside an organization wearing the "cloven hoof of socialism". In other words, even though the vast majority of the strikers did not label themselves as "socialists", they nonetheless readily contributed to come "as near as they could to practical socialism",[39] to quote Kemmy again—and this during nearly ten months. This would tend to demonstrate that the concept of utopian impulse most assuredly permeated the latter land experiment in a three-stage process, it being itself pervaded throughout by two seemingly contradictory sentiments: despair and hope. From small farmers to agricultural laborers, therefore, most of them undoubtedly felt extreme dissatisfaction with existing conditions and, in this case, not only with their landlord's refusal to reduce their rents and the slow pace of land distribution, but also with their failure to win concessions. This feeling of despair towards the system in place led them to practically express hope for a new, better and "inverted" organizational structure, for themselves and the local community, in the form of a self-managed soviet, as an alternative and pragmatic response to the unsatisfying present private property rights. For, as in the above-mentioned Knocklong soviet, their decision to run the estate themselves democratically was above all meant to substantiate the appropriateness of their demands.

The Irish Soviets, as epitomized in the Limerick, Cleeves and Broadford soviets examined here, were quite clearly imbued with a utopian impulse, growing more intense over time as a result of changes in the political and economic environment, and whereby:

1. the workers felt profound dissatisfaction with existing conditions (which is at the root of any utopian process) and, in this case, with British militarism, their particularly high rents, low salaries or their employers' attempt at cutting them, but also with their failure to win concessions from the imperial authorities, employers and landlords through strike action or negotiations;
2. the workers practically expressed hope for a better, "inverted", if not perfect organizational structure for themselves and the population at large—amidst a climate of political and violent turmoil not only in Europe but also in Ireland through the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin's fight for complete independence—, this either as a temporary radical tactic to have their claims met or as a permanent alternative to the current private property rights;
3. the soviets were all pragmatic responses to current dissatisfaction, the result of direct action, which is one of the basic principles of a syndicalist doctrine, not as theoretically elaborate as other tendencies within the socialist movement;[40]
4. they were all more or less transient, lasting from a few hours to several months, due either to successful bargaining, or to intense external pressures.[41]

And yet, were not the areas where those self-managed experiments took place alleged to be intrinsically anti-socialist—and, therefore, naturally averse to giving vent to such progressive utopian impulse—owing to their essentially rural, nationalist and Catholic character? Most probably, indeed, except for the fact that the Irish Revolution was also a transitional period, during which such a progressive force as the labor movement asserted itself and expanded rapidly to ensure that workers achieved full recognition of their right in an independent Ireland.[42] The conservative society into which Ireland was to evolve following the setting up of the Irish Free State did not really exist yet. Far from being predetermined—although contained in embryo for a few decades—, the advent of the new state's prevailing paradigms was therefore rather the result of the conservative spirit that had eventually swept through the whole separatist movement—this not so much to defend the status quo as to eradicate any division within the Irish nationalist community—[43] at the expense of the progressive tenets endorsed by the many unionized workers of the revolutionary era.[44] Ultimately, this reminds us that history is not a linear process, a matter of teleological explanation whereby the present would be the inevitable result of deliberate and premeditated construction; while it rather appears as the culmination of a long series of historical accidents forged by largely unforeseeable or inexorable circumstances at the time of occurrence. This was true in the case of Irish soviets inspired

by the continental political and social context, and taking advantage of the political instability and turmoil Ireland had been facing from 1916 onwards.

However, for a more comprehensive analysis of the present topic, it remains to be seen whether the Irish soviets were not set up against a backdrop of intertwined utopian impulse and class struggle—whose liberal theory, at least as drawn up by the French philosopher and sociologist Raymond Aron, also involves the two conflicting sentiments, hope and despair;[44] or whether different forms of utopia—in accordance with Karl Mannheim's typology of the utopian mentality, including chiliasm, the liberal-humanist idea, the conservative idea, and the socialist-communist utopia—[45] were not in mutual opposition during the Irish Revolution through the main forces involved, thus explaining why such potentially subversive vehicles as the soviets, albeit eventually quelled, have never given rise to progressive forces sufficiently powerful to counterbalance independent Ireland's conservatism—or independent Ireland's utopian conservatism?

[1]. On the Russian soviets and factory committees, see Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905-1921* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974, orig. 1958).
[2]. Charles Townshend, "Historiography: Telling the Irish Revolution", in *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923*, ed. Joost Augusteijn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 6.
[3]. Except for Emmet O'Connor's *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917-1923* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1988), Conor Kostick's *Revolution in Ireland: Popular Militancy 1917 to 1923* (London: Pluto Press, 1996) and Luke Dineen's "The Cork Harbour Soviet of 1921" (*Saothar* 42, (2017): 31-42), the other works devoted to the Irish soviets have been conducted by independent scholars. But even in all of the latter works, the Irish soviets taken as a whole have not been given a comprehensive examination yet.
[4]. One particularly relevant example is the latest monograph by Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The fight for Irish Independence, 1918-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).
[5]. See, for example, Peter Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21.
[6]. Terence Dooley, *'The Land for the People': The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 2004), 17.
[7]. Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011, orig. 1990), 1-5, 7-9, 41-42, 208-210, 200-222.
[8]. Yolène Dial-Rochereux, *L'Utopie ou la mémoire du futur* [Utopia, or the Memory of the Future] (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000), 9, 181, 183, 187, 193. See also Levitas, ibid., 7, 97, 123, 151.
[9]. The notion of "utopian impulse" actually provides the conceptual basis of Ernst Bloch's major work: *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vol. (Cambridge, Massachussetts: The MIT Press, 1998, orig. 1954, 1955, 1959).
[10]. Vincent Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008, orig. 1987), 16-17. See also Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 2-3.
[11]. On the Limerick soviet, see Liam Cahill, *Forgotten Revolution: Limerick Soviet, 1919, A Threat to British Power in Ireland* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1990), https://libcom.org/history/forgotten-revolution-limerick-soviet-1919-liam-cahill; D. R. O'Connor Lysaght, *The Story of The Limerick Soviet: The 1919 General Strike Against British Militarism* (Limerick: The Limerick Soviet Commemoration Committee, 3rd edition, 2003, orig. 1979), http://homepage.eircom.net/~paddytheassessor/lim//lysaght.htm
[12]. John O'Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick: The Republican Campaign for Independence in Limerick, 1913-21* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 119-123.
[13]. Niamh Hehir and Joe Morrissey, "Revolt of the Bottom Dogs: History of the Trade Union Movement, Limerick City and County 1916-1921", *Labour History Research Group* 1 (n.d.): 11.
[14]. Dominic Haugh, "Socialist Revolution in Ireland: A lost Opportunity, 1916-22", in *Marxist Perspectives on Irish Society*, ed. Michael O'Flynn et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 12.
[15]. Cahill, *Forgotten Revolution*, Chapter Eleven: The Workers Defeated
[16]. O'Connor Lysaght, *The Story of The Limerick Soviet*, Union Bureaucrats Make Their Move
[17]. Syndicalism can be defined as a doctrine aimed at organizing the workers as a whole into "one big union" to achieve working class control of all industries by direct means, with a view to establishing a socialist society.
[18]. For a detailed account of the Cleeves soviets, see David Lee, "The Munster Soviets and the Fall of the House of Cleeve", in *Made in Limerick*, vol. 1, *History of Industries, trade and commerce*, ed. David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (Limerick: Limerick Civic Trust, 2003), 287-306, http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/limerick%20soviet%2015.pdf; D. R. O'Connor Lysaght, "The Munster Soviet Creameries", *Irish History Workshop* 1 (1981): 36-49.
[19]. *The Voice of Labour* (Dublin), December 10, 1921.
[20]. Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 13.
[21]. *The Voice of Labour*, ibid.
[22]. *The Irish Times* (Dublin), May 29, 1920.
[23]. Judith Brown, "Ernst Bloch and the Utopian Imagination", *ERAS Journal* 5 (November 2003), http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/eras/ernst-bloch-and-the-utopian-imagination/
[24]. Quoted in *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), May 22, 1920.
[25]. Quoted in *Freeman's Journal*, August 31, 1921; *The Irish Examiner* (Dublin), August 31, 1921; *The Irish Independent* (Dublin), August 31, 1921.
[26]. Public Record Office London, *Strikes and Lockouts, 1914-21*, Lab 34/14-20, Lab 34/32-39, figures cited in O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland*, 25. However, the Irish workers' achievements should be somewhat qualified given that the significant wage increases won as a result of strike actions hardly compensated for the rising retail price of food. See David Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland, 1914-21", *Saothar* 6, (1980): 32.
[27]. O'Connor, ibid., 106.
[28]. Quoted in *The Irish Times*, May 15, 1922.
[29]. Ibid.
[30]. Teivos, "A Visit to a 'Soviets' Factory", *The Voice of Labour*, May, 27, 1922.
[31]. O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland*, 154.
[32]. For example, while the 1920 Knocklong and the 1921 Arigna soviet are referred to in the report of the 1921 annual meeting of the ILPTUC, no mention is made of the 1922 Cleeves soviets in the 1922 and 1923 reports. See Irish Labour

Party and Trade Union Congress, *Report of the Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting*, Dublin, August 1, 2, 3, 4, 1921, 13; Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Report of the Twenty-eighth Annual Meeting*, Dublin, August 1922; Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Report of the Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting*, Dublin, August 6, 7, 8, 9, 1923, http://centenaries-ituc.nationalarchives.ie/annual-reports/

[33]. On the Broadford soviet, see Michael McCarthy, "The Broadford Soviet", *The Old Limerick Journal* 4 (1980): 37-40, http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/Media,3937,en.pdf.

[34]. The massive settlement of English and Scottish Protestants in Ireland carried out all along the XVIIth century reached such a degree that by 1703 only about 14 percent of Irish land was still in Catholic hands—as against 90 percent in 1603. It was not until the 1879-82 Land War that the Catholic peasantry would gradually repossess the confiscated lands, principally outside of the province of Ulster, through a series of agrarian reforms culminating with the Wyndham Act (1903) and the Birrell Act (1909) that allowed tenant farmers to purchase their holdings through refundable loans granted by the State.

[35]. On these land soviets, see *Freeman's Journal*, May 3, 1923; May 9, 1923; May 17, 1923; May 25, 1923.

[36]. McCarthy, "The Broadford Soviet", 40.

[37]. Kostick, *Revolution in Ireland*, 70; James Kemmy, "The Limerick Soviet", *The Irish Times*, May, 9 1969, p. 14.

[38]. Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), 104.

[39]. Kemmy, "The Limerick Soviet".

[40]. On the origins and principles of syndicalism, see O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland*, 1-8.

[41]. This last feature actually relates to the more general issue pertaining to utopia that was raised notably in a Copernic seminar held in Paris on October 9, 2012, under the title, "*Les utopies sont-elles condamnées à l'échec ?*" [Are utopias doomed to failure?], http://www.fondation-copernic.org/spip.php?article769

[42]. O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland*, 46-116.

[43]. Olivier Coquelin, "Politics in the Irish Free State: The Legacy of a Conservative Revolution", *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms* 10, n° 1 (February 2005): 29-40.

[44]. At that time, the Irish Labour movement was embodied by the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC) which had dramatically increased the number of its affiliates since the 1916 annual congress, reaching 300,000 in 1921. If one refers to the 1911 census, this figure accounted for approximately 48 % of all workers—including agricultural laborers —, themselves representing roughly one third of the working population, out of a total population of 4,390,219 inhabitants. This dramatic growth in union membership was mainly the result of the diverse campaigns led by the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, which could count on 100,000 members by 1920. See Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Report of the Twenty-sixth Annual Meeting*, Cork, 2, 3, 4, 5 August 1920, 154; Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Report of the Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting*, Dublin, August 1, 2, 3, 4, 1921, 75, http://centenaries-ituc.nationalarchives.ie/annual-reports/; W. E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick, eds., *Irish Historical Statistics* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 3; Census of Ireland, 1911, *General report*, Occupations of the people, 1912-13, Cd.6663, CXVIII, 1, xxviii-xxx.

[44]. Aron argues that, for class struggle to develop into revolution, as envisioned by Karl Marx, two contradictory sentiments must prevail: hope and despair—that is, hope for a new society resulting from profound dissatisfaction with existing conditions. Two sentiments, Aron points out, that are mostly felt in backward capitalist and predominantly agrarian countries, such as Russia in 1917. See Raymond Aron, *La Lutte de classes : nouvelles leçons sur les sociétés industrielles* [Class Struggle: New Lectures on Industrial Societies] (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 21-127, 197-309.

[45]. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, orig. 1936), 190-221.

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The Bruree Soviet, 1921 “We make BREAD, not PROFITS”

Utopian Studies

Utopian Impulse in the Irish Revolution: A Case Study of the 1918-23 Irish Soviets

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Abstract:	During the 1916-1923 Revolution, Ireland underwent considerable social turmoil, in both industrial and agrarian fields. But while the socioeconomic dimension of the Irish revolution has received academic recognition for several decades, many historians have nonetheless tended to downplay its historical significance. This not least because it did not give rise to any radical social change in the new Irish Free State, despite the emergence of an alternative organizational method, named “soviet” after the council movement that sprang up in the 1917 Russian Revolution. The present article, therefore, sets out to somewhat qualify the relevance of such analysis. In so doing, it will determine to what extent the resort to the self-managed soviets was the expression of what Ernest Bloch defined as “utopian impulse”, how the latter impacted the Irish revolutionary movement, and why it was eventually stifled, thus contributing to the establishment of a conservative state in Independent Ireland.
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