



HAL
open science

Two Visions of Irish Republicanism Drawn Up in Captivity: John Mitchel's Jail Journal and Michael Davitt's Leaves From a Prison Diary

Olivier Coquelin

► **To cite this version:**

Olivier Coquelin. Two Visions of Irish Republicanism Drawn Up in Captivity: John Mitchel's Jail Journal and Michael Davitt's Leaves From a Prison Diary. *Visual, Material and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, Society for the Study of the Nineteenth-Century Ireland, Jun 2008, Limerick, Ireland. pp.176-185. hal-02387344

HAL Id: hal-02387344

<https://hal.science/hal-02387344>

Submitted on 12 Dec 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Two visions of Irish republicanism drawn up in captivity: John Mitchel's *Jail Journal* and Michael Davitt's *Leaves From a Prison Diary*

OLIVIER COQUELIN

Writing a diary, a journal or letters while in jail for political reasons is quite a common feature of modern and contemporary times.¹ In Ireland, such phenomena manifested themselves notably through the republican movement – and most recently through some of the IRA prisoners in the Maze prison from the 1970s onwards. But the two most prominent cases undoubtedly date back to the nineteenth century; the most prominent because they paved the way for the two main leanings within modern Irish republicanism – orthodox republicanism and republican socialism, most recently epitomized in the 'provisional' and 'official' movements. These two cases actually take the form of a journal and of a diary, written in captivity by John Mitchel and Michael Davitt respectively and entitled *Jail Journal* and *Leaves From a Prison Diary*.

The goal of the present article is therefore to explain, through an ideological analysis, why these nineteenth-century political works can be regarded as major pieces of writing in modern and contemporary Irish history, and to discuss the extent to which they symbolize the inception of a culture of prison writings in the Irish republican movement. But before tackling these issues, it seems necessary to define and describe succinctly both orthodox republicanism and republican socialism.

The political doctrine of modern Irish republicanism² was born with the Irish

¹ This theme was developed as part of several conferences held notably in the University of York ('Prison Writings in Early Britain', schedule available at www.york.ac.uk/crems/downloads/Prison%20Writings/conference_report.pdf accessed 3 June 2008, and in the University of Angers, France ('Récits de prison et d'enfermement [Prison and Confinement Narratives]', schedule available at www.univ-angers.fr/images/documents/Lettres/MSH/programme_colloque_prison.pdf accessed 5–7 June 2008. ² As opposed to 'original Irish republicanism', which flourished in the 1790s through the Society of United Irishmen, who were mainly inspired by the contractual and secular dimension of the Enlightenment when fighting against what they regarded as a corrupt and illegal power held by a vast majority of Anglican landlords. The original Irish republicans had therefore a political, irenic and economic conception of national liberation based on the conquest of the Irish government for the middle classes of every religious persuasion, with the support of the lower classes, in order to liberate the Irish economy from the restrictions imposed by Britain. For a thorough

Republican Brotherhood (IRB), also known as the Fenian movement, throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. The orthodox version of Irish republicanism aimed to establish an independent Irish republic, ideally by a strategy of 'physical force' that was a constituent part of the Irish republican tradition³ – even though the development undertaken by the Fenians over time had led them, in certain circumstances, to consider other means to achieve their objective, at least until the 1910s.⁴ In the socio-economic field, on the other hand, the orthodox Irish republicans had but a vague idea of how they would build independent Ireland. Thus, for example, while peasant proprietorship was sometimes advocated in the nineteenth century, the welfare of the peasantry, or of the people as a whole, was nonetheless subservient to national freedom. For, according to the Irish separatists, the settlement of the social and economic questions depended on the political emancipation of Ireland. This close connection between political liberation and socio-economic prosperity was in line with one of the ideological mainstays on which Irish nationalism, whether constitutional or revolutionary, had rested since the passing of the Act of Union in 1800.⁵

By contrast, as a counterpoint to this republican orthodoxy emerged fringe leftist groups standing for socio-economic upheavals within the framework of a politically liberated Ireland, a goal which they expected to achieve by combining social and political struggles of whatever nature on a revolutionary basis. Their nationalism, therefore, took on a class character, in accordance with their social conception of an Irish nation mainly embodied in the proletariat and peasantry. Hence, the name 'republican socialism' used to refer to this current of thought combining Irish republicanism with socialism,⁶ the first key figure of which was undoubtedly James Connolly.⁷ But, before the advent of the orthodox Fenians and the republican social-

analysis of early republicanism in Ireland, see for example Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: popular politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791–8* (Oxford, 1994); Stephen Small, *Political thought in Ireland, 1776–98: republicanism, patriotism, and radicalism* (Oxford, 2002). ³ R.V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848–82* (Dublin, 1998), pp 227, 239. ⁴ On the different stages of the IRB's ideological development, from the origins to the Easter Rising of 1916, see notably Owen McGee, *The IRB: the Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 2005); M.J. Kelly, *The Fenian ideal and Irish nationalism, 1882–1916* (Woodbridge, 2006). ⁵ On this topic, see for example Olivier Coquelin, 'La Révolution conservatrice: genèse idéologique de l'Irlande politique et sociale, 1800–1923 [The Conservative Revolution: ideological genesis of political and social Ireland, 1800–1923]' (PhD, University of Rennes 2, France, 2004), pp 50–304. ⁶ The term 'socialism' as used here refers to those various nineteenth-century theories and doctrines aiming at collective ownership and management of the means of production, capital, land, property, etc., in the interest of the community as a whole. ⁷ On the origins and ideological foundations of republican socialism, see notably Richard English, 'Green on red: two case studies in early twentieth-century Irish republican thought' in D. George Boyce et al. (eds), *Political thought in Ireland since the seventeenth century* (London, 1993), pp 161–89; Olivier Coquelin, 'Lalor, Davitt et Connolly, ou l'avènement de l'aile gauche du mouvement révolutionnaire irlandais, 1846–1916 [Lalor, Davitt and Connolly, or the advent of the left wing of the Irish revolutionary movement, 1846–1916]' *LISA (Littérature, histoire des idées,*

ists on the Irish political scene, the doctrinal foundations on which their respective goals were based had been laid by two historical figures, John Mitchel and Michael Davitt, through the journal and diary they had drafted while in prison, as shall be seen below.

Mitchel was born to Presbyterian parents in Camnish, near Dungiven (Co. Derry), in 1815. A lawyer by training, he practised as a solicitor between 1840 and 1845. Meanwhile, he had engaged in political activities, as he joined Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Association in 1843. Two years later, he became associated with the Young Ireland movement and its newspaper, the *Nation*, for which he was to write a number of articles before he resigned his position as a journalist in 1847, owing to political differences. In fact, Mitchel differed from the other Young Irelanders in that he pronounced himself for radical courses of action such as armed insurrection, at least as a last resort, so as to reach Irish independence. He therefore launched his own newspaper, the *United Irishman*, in February 1848. However, the French Revolution of February 1848 contributed to the radicalization of the Young Ireland movement henceforth won over to Mitchel's goal of an independent Irish republic established by force of arms. The attempted achievement of this goal took place in July 1848 without Mitchel, due to his arrest on a charge of seditious libels, about two months before the outbreak of the abortive rebellion. He was sentenced to transportation for a fourteen year term, but escaped from the penal colony of Tasmania in 1853 and took refuge in the USA, where he was to embrace the cause of the South in the Civil War as well as that of the Fenians from 1865. He returned to Ireland in 1875 and died just a few days after he had won a by-election to become a Member of Parliament, with the support of the IRB.⁸

It was during his five years of captivity that Mitchel drafted what was to become his major piece of work, which was first published as a book in 1854 under the title of *Jail Journal*. This work can be regarded as a classic of Irish republican literature in that, in addition to the detailed accounts of Mitchel's prison life and opinions on events and individuals, it emphasizes at least three of the main doctrinal mainstays on which the orthodox version of modern Irish republicanism is based: the establishment of Irish independence by force of arms; the establishment of Irish independence under a republican form of government; and the subservience of social issues to the political and national question. These doctrinal mainstays remain features of modern Irish republicanism having nonetheless undergone development throughout its history.⁹ And while they had already imbued Mitchel's political

images, sociétés du monde anglophone, Culture and society (2006), available at www.unicaen.fr/mrsh/lisa/publications/enCours/coquelin01.pdf accessed 4 June 2008. ⁸ Although seven biographies of Mitchel had been published between 1888 and 1947 – see, for example, William Dillon, *The life of John Mitchel*, 2 vols (London, 1888) – it was not until the early 2000s that a new biography was written. Aidan Hegarty, *Mitchel: a cause too many* (Belfast, 2005). But the latest publication on Mitchel's life was the work of James Quinn for the Historical Association's Life and Times New Series, in 2008. James Quinn, *John Mitchel* (Dublin, 2008). ⁹ See note 4.

writings in both the *Nation* and the *United Irishman*, they were to take on a genuine literary dimension through his *Jail Journal*. As Arthur Griffith puts it in his preface written in the 1913 edition, 'In the political literature of Ireland it [Mitchel's *Jail Journal*] has no peer outside Swift. In the literature of the prison it has no equal.'¹⁰

Thus, the insurrectional aspect of Mitchel's political ideology is highlighted notably by the recurrent use of words having violent connotations towards British rule in Ireland. Words such as 'cruel', 'crime', 'criminal', 'chastise', 'punish', 'punishment', 'vengeance', 'avenge' etc., referring to a British government which, in Mitchel's language, symbolizes tyranny and injustice, as opposed to a British nation or people the best friend of whom 'is simply he who approves himself the bitterest enemy to their government, and to all their institutions, in church and state'.¹¹ In so doing, he quite clearly intimates that British sway in Ireland can be overthrown but by 'physical force', especially as 'to this condition [of Great Famine] had forty years of "moral and peaceful agitation" brought Ireland'.¹² This last point means that the inefficiency of constitutional agitation, as Mitchel sees it, can be regarded as a vindication of the use of arms to achieve independence, which is explicitly confirmed in the following passages:

And, as if that were not enough, all the influence of the constitutional agitators, and, in a great measure, of the priests also, has been exerted to make the use of arms appear a sin against God. They have not been taught that it is the prerogative of man to bear arms – that beasts alone go without them ... Before there can be any general arming, or aptitude to insurrection, there must first be sound manly doctrine preached and embraced. And next, there must be many desultory collisions with British troops, both in town and country ... If Ireland, in '82, instead of winning her independence from the coward foe by the mere flesh of unbloody swords, had, like America, waded through carnage to her freedom, like America she had been free this day. A disastrous war even, had been better than a triumphant parade.¹³

But this is above all hatred of British supremacy, conveyed in a number of particular terms, which vindicates the use of arms in Mitchel's mind. Hatred which also stimulates the 'sound manly doctrine' that he contemplates preaching, starting with a republican principle having supposedly inspired his revolutionary designs. Except that Mitchel's republicanism, notably owing to his *a priori* inegalitarian vision of humanity,¹⁴ quite clearly had its roots less in the political theories of the eighteenth-century philosophers than in his visceral hatred of England and her institutions. To this last point bears testimony the following extract from a dialogue between Mitchel, alias The Ego, and a fictional character called Doppelganger, who is none other than his double:

¹⁰ Arthur Griffith, 'Preface' in John Mitchel, *Jail journal: or, five years in British prisons* (Dublin, 1913), pp xv–xvi. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83. ¹² *Ibid.*, p. xlix. ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 146–7, 205. ¹⁴ On p. 84, Mitchel refers to 'the eternal inequalities of condition in human society'.

Doppelgänger I know well that you feel no antipathy to either a monarchical or an aristocratic government, as such; that, in fact, within your secret heart, you care very little about Republicanism in the abstract.

The Ego Not a rush. What then?

Doppelgänger Then I am forced to conclude that your anxiety for the success of the French Republic¹⁵ springs from something else than zeal for the welfare of the human race.

The Ego A fig for the human race; to be sure it does.

Doppelgänger Yes; it is born of no love for mankind, or even French mankind, but of pure hatred to England, and a diseased longing for blood and carnage.¹⁶

And Mitchel, alias *The Ego*, further adds concerning aristocratic and monarchic institutions: 'I regard aristocratic and monarchic institutions . . . as being for the Western nations of Europe worn out . . . For England, for Ireland especially, I believe those institutions are far more than worn out'.¹⁷ Mitchel's republicanism can therefore be considered more as a means to an end than as an end in itself, the end being to secede from the British Empire so as to establish an independent Irish state; an end which was to be that of the subsequent orthodox republican movement – although the original IRB was also, to quote Owen McGee, 'a revolutionary fraternal organization determined to instil into the Irish masses the ability to think and act as' citizens of a free nation,¹⁸ ' . . . an underground party that could accommodate diversity of political opinion',¹⁹ provided that all members²⁰ shared the same supreme goal of an independent democratic republic in Ireland.

In the same vein, as early as autumn 1847, Mitchel had adopted the idea of social revolution, according to his contemporary, James Fintan Lalor – namely based on the abolition of landlordism so as to establish instead peasant proprietorship through a fair and equitable distribution of land among the Irish farmers, provided, nonetheless, that this social revolution should act as a catalyst for a mass uprising against imperial oppression. As Arthur Griffith points out in this respect, 'To Mitchel, the question of the land was a question to help Ireland to political independence. To Lalor, the political independence was a question to help the peasantry to regain the soil'.²¹ But while Mitchel's idea of social revolution subservient to political revolution is not explicitly expressed in his *Jail Journal*, he alludes to it several times, as in the already quoted passage: 'Before there can be any general arming, or aptitude to

insurrection, there must first be sound manly doctrine preached and embraced. And next, there must be many desultory collisions with British troops . . .'. In addition to the principle of Irish independence under a republican form of government, we are entitled to believe that this 'sound manly doctrine' that Mitchel refers to, also includes the principle of social revolution, as he was to confirm, at least implicitly, in a letter of 1859: 'I am convinced and have long been, that the mass of the Irish people cannot be roused in any quarrel less than social revolution, destruction of landlordism, and denial of all title and tenure derived from English sovereigns'.²² Here too, we may safely infer from all this that Mitchel's desire to destroy landlordism was motivated more by the British origins of landlordism than by any supposed endorsement of Enlightenment-inspired liberalism or socialism. Socialist doctrines and their advocates, which he utterly abhorred anyhow, were described in his *Jail Journal* as 'something worse than wild beasts'.²³ And it was notably on this last issue, relating to socialism, that Michael Davitt was to differ from the orthodox republicans in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

It was in Straide, Co. Mayo, that Michael Davitt was born into a Catholic family of small tenant farmers in 1846, the first year of the Great Famine. Evicted from their farm in 1850, the Davitts were compelled to emigrate to England, where they took up residence in the industrial town of Haslingden in Lancashire. While there, Michael Davitt largely educated himself and developed a political consciousness notably thanks to his contact with the local members of the IRB, which he joined in 1865. However, his various subversive activities eventually attracted police attention. He was arrested for illegal arms-dealing in 1870 and sentenced to fifteen years of labour servitude in Dartmoor Prison. Seven years later, he was released on ticket-of-leave, partly as a result of public pressure over his harsh treatment – especially as he had been one-armed since he was eleven, following an accident in the cotton mill of Haslingden where he had started work two years earlier.²⁴

During his detention, Davitt had supposedly drawn the conclusion that the policy of 'physical force' hitherto carried out by the Fenian movement since its creation in 1858 had been in vain and inefficient. It was therefore necessary to change the republicans' strategic direction, through the creation of a mass national movement unified around the land question.²⁵ But while Davitt failed to convince the IRB

²² Quoted in Thomas Flanagan, 'Rebellion and style: John Mitchel and the *Jail journal*', *Irish University Review*, 1 (1970), 6. ²³ Mitchel, *Jail journal*, p. 78. ²⁴ T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish revolution, 1846–82* (Oxford, 1981), pp 3–180; T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt in penal servitude, 1870–77', *Studies*, 30:120 (1941), 517–30; T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt in penal servitude, 1870–77', *Studies*, 31:121 (1942), 16–30; Carla King, *Michael Davitt* (Dundalk, 1999), pp 10–14. ²⁵ This is what Davitt asserted in interviews published in the *Irishman* on 14 Dec. 1878 and in the *Daily World* on 9 July 1882. It is important to note here that Davitt's assumption that he developed his new ideas while in jail is questioned notably by his contemporary, John Devoy. John Devoy, *Michael Davitt: from the Gaelic American*, eds Carla King and W.J. McCormack (Dublin, 2008, first published in instalments in the *Gaelic American* in 1906), p. 22.

¹⁵ Mitchel refers to the French Second Republic established in Feb. 1848 as a result of an armed revolution. ¹⁶ Mitchel, *Jail journal*, p. 80. ¹⁷ *Ibid.* ¹⁸ McGee, *The IRB*, p. 15. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12. ²⁰ And even such a major republican figure as John O'Leary, who was ideologically more inclined to foster the establishment of an Irish monarchy. Leon O'Broin, *Revolutionary underground: the story of the IRB, 1858–1914* (Dublin, 1976), p. 30. ²¹ Arthur Griffith, 'Preface' in James Fintan Lalor, *James Fintan Lalor: patriot and political essayist*, ed. L. Fogarty (Dublin, 1918), p. ix.

Supreme Council of the merits of his designs, based on the combination of Irish self-government and land reform, Charles Parnell and his supporters in the Irish Parliamentary Party, together with some republican activists and leaders, were won over to Davitt's and John Devoy's 'new departure'.²⁶ As a result, the Irish National Land League was launched in October 1879 with Parnell as its president. Davitt recalled in his 1904 *Fall of feudalism*, that 'what was wanted was to link the land or social question to that of Home Rule, by making the ownership of the soil the basis of the fight for self-government'.²⁷ This ran counter to a republican orthodoxy relegating socio-economic issues to positions of secondary importance and seeing the English Parliament as, to quote the leading Fenian figure Charles Kickham, 'no place for an Irish patriot'.²⁸

Armed with the slogan 'the Land for the People', the Land League waged a land war for over two and a half years: a land war against landlordism, to which the British government responded with a mixture of concession and coercion: concession with the adoption of the 1881 land act, which established the famous three Fs (fair rent, fixity of tenure, free sale of a tenant's interest in a property); coercion with the imprisonment of the Land League leaders, including Davitt between February 1881 and May 1882.²⁹

During his second spell in prison, Davitt drafted his first major piece of work, entitled *Leaves From a Prison Diary* and published in 1885.³⁰ The book is composed of thirty-four lectures in which, in addition to the detailed accounts of his prison life and views on various social issues, Davitt puts forward a certain number of socio-economic proposals to be implemented in a system called 'state socialism'. In this

²⁶ According to T.W. Moody, the real initiator of this second 'new departure' in Irish politics – the first one dating from 1873 with the Fenians' support to the Home Rule movement led by Isaac Butt – was not Davitt but John Devoy – one of the leaders of the American Fenian organization, *Clan na Gael* – who conceived it as follows: 'First, abandonment of the federal demand and substitution of a general declaration in favour of self-government; second, vigorous agitation of the land question on the basis of a peasant property, while accepting concessions tending to abolish arbitrary eviction; third, exclusion of all sectarian issues from the platform; fourth, Irish members to vote together on all imperial and home questions, adopt an aggressive policy and energetically resist coercive legislation; fifth, advocacy of all struggling nationalities in the British Empire or elsewhere'. Published in *Irishman*, 16 Nov. 1878. Also quoted in Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland or the story of the Land League Revolution* (London, 1904), pp 125–6. See also T.W. Moody, 'The New Departure in Irish politics' in H.A. Cronne et al. (eds), *Essays in British and Irish history in honour of James Eadie Todd* (London, 1949), pp 303–33; Moody, *Davitt*, pp 122–3, 233–4, 249–53. ²⁷ Davitt, *Fall*, p. 121. ²⁸ *Irishman*, 9 Nov. 1878. ²⁹ Moody, *Davitt*, pp 320–533; King, *Michael Davitt*, pp 22–37. ³⁰ It is interesting to note here that, while in jail in 1881–2, Davitt had drafted another essay devoted to some of his reflections on subjects which differed, in many respects, from those developed in *Leaves*. Initially planned to be published after his release from prison, it was not until 2003 that Davitt's 'jottings' were edited for the first time by Carla King. Michael Davitt, *Jottings in solitary*, ed. Carla King (Dublin, 2003); Michael Davitt, *Leaves from a prison diary, or lectures to a 'solitary' audience* (London, 1885).

work, Davitt overtly espouses a socialist or socialistic doctrine, founded on at least three mainstays: state ownership of raw materials and railways; development of worker cooperatives regulated by the state; and land nationalization. Inspired by the American economist Henry George,³¹ Davitt's project of land nationalization – whereby 'it is the annual value of the bare land, irrespective of improvements, which it is proposed to appropriate in the form of taxation'³² – was motivated by the fact that the principle of peasant proprietorship which lay behind the Land League's slogan 'the Land for the People', actually did not concern the people as a whole, but only a portion of it – that is, the peasantry. Thus, under the system of state ownership of land, 'every individual worker would be in a position to command exactly that share of the wealth produced which he had by his labour created; while the community at large would be put in possession of that portion of the wealth produced of which it was the sole creator'.³³

Davitt's collectivistic and socialistic designs were not to arouse great enthusiasm among the Irish people as a whole, however, and even less among an Irish peasantry eager to acquire private and individual property. As for the traditionally anti-socialist Irish nationalists, whether constitutionalist or revolutionary,³⁴ they disparaged Davitt's plans in particular because he conceived that they could be implemented by a British government, and therefore in a situation of national subservience to British rule. To this, Davitt was to respond in the *Times*, first, that 'I am convinced, however, that a calm consideration of the question will dissipate the idea that the nationalization of the land of Ireland is any more of a recognition of England's right to rule us than is involved in the payment of taxes or in calling upon its government to advance the necessary funds for the carrying out of a scheme of peasant proprietary'; and, second, that 'the only remedy (for the Anglo-Irish difficulty) is self-government for Ireland and the nationalization of the land under the administration of an Irish Parliament'.³⁵ This last point means that Davitt remained faithful to his aim based on the political and social liberation of the Irish people; a social liberation henceforward imbued with socialistic principles. Besides, this aim is quite explicitly expressed in *Leaves From a Prison Diary*, at least in the following sentence: 'Our grievance is national, as well as constitutional and social, and none but a national and constitutional remedy will suffice for its removal'.³⁶ As for his political objectives, while Davitt offers a pragmatic proposal for a constitution quite similar to that enjoyed by Canada at that time and likely to gain support from the nationalists of all shades of opinion,³⁷ he also alludes to the fact that he has not basically abandoned the idea of Irish legislative independence as 'the rational solution of the whole Irish question', as he was to write much

³¹ According to Carla King, the book that greatly influenced Davitt's writings on land nationalization, while in jail, was Henry George's *Progress and poverty*, first published in 1879. Davitt, *Jottings*, pp xxiv–xxv; Henry George, *Progress and poverty* (New York, 1998, orig. 1879). ³² Davitt, *Leaves*, p. 229. ³³ *Ibid.* ³⁴ There were nonetheless a few republicans with socialist leanings such as, for example, Thomas Fitzpatrick and Fred Allan who became affiliated to the IRB in 1880. McGee, *The IRB*, p. 68. ³⁵ *Times*, 7 June 1882. ³⁶ Davitt, *Leaves*, p. 341. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 346–51.

later in his *Fall of feudalism*.³⁸ Even more unambiguous, in this respect, is the following extract from his will, which was made public shortly after his death in 1906: 'To all my friends I leave my kind thoughts, to my enemies the fullest possible forgiveness, and to Ireland my undying prayer for her absolute freedom and independence, which it was my life's ambition to try to obtain for her'.³⁹

In the light of the preceding analysis, we are entitled to believe that Davitt's *Leaves From a Prison Diary* contains the doctrinal seeds of what was to be commonly called 'republican socialism' – particularly following the creation of James Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP) in 1896 – the advocates of which aimed at the radical and progressive transformation of political and social Ireland, through courses of action of a pragmatic nature.⁴⁰ And this was confirmed, at least indirectly, by George Gilmore, one of the leaders of the republican socialist organization, the Republican Congress,⁴¹ when he wrote in 1935: 'The Republican Congress was another attempt to do what Lalor and Davitt and Connolly had tried to do'.⁴²

Both *Jail Journal* and *Leaves From a Prison Diary* are major pieces of writing in modern and contemporary Irish history, in that they embody some sort of ideological transition between two currents of thought within Irish republicanism – transition between original republicanism⁴³ and modern republicanism for Mitchell's *Jail Journal*; transition between orthodox republicanism and republican socialism for Davitt's *Leaves From a Prison Diary*. And the fact that they were drafted in jail also marked the inception of a culture of prison writings in the Irish republican movement, but a culture founded on the feature of ideological transition, as mentioned above. For this transitory phenomenon was to occur again with the 'provisional' prisoners in the Maze prison, after the 1981 hunger strikes. Thus, the ideological evolution undertaken by the IRA prisoners, whose written and oral accounts have been published in two books,⁴⁴ was to have an impact on the heterodox strategy adopted by the provisional movement in the resolution of the Northern Irish conflict from the 1990s.⁴⁵

³⁸ Davitt, *Fall*, p. 724. ³⁹ Quoted in Devoy, *Michael Davitt*, p. 14. ⁴⁰ Nowadays, republican socialism is embodied notably in the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), founded in 1974, which is guided by the belief 'that the class struggle and national liberation struggle cannot be separated . . .'. The IRSP's website is www.irsm.org/irsp/ accessed 5 June 2008. ⁴¹ The Republican Congress was a short-lived political party founded by left-wing republicans and communist activists in 1934. George Gilmore, *The Republican Congress* (Cork, 1986, orig. 1935). ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 4. Except that, in the socio-economic field, Fintan Lalor can be described more as either a radical reformer or a 'social revolutionary' – advocating a fair and equitable distribution of land among the Irish peasantry – than as a socialist, properly speaking. David N. Buckley, *James Fintan Lalor: radical* (Cork, 1990); Coquelin, 'Révolution conservatrice', pp 332–69. For a definition of socialism, see note 6. ⁴³ See note 2. ⁴⁴ Brian Campbell et al. (eds), *Nor meekly serve my time: the H-Block struggle, 1976–1981* (Belfast, 1994); Laurence McKeown, *Out of time: Irish republican prisoners, Long Kesh, 1972–2000* (Belfast, 2001). ⁴⁵ This is what the former IRA volunteer and prisoner, Laurence McKeown, asserted, among other things, in the lecture he delivered during a conference held at Brest University, France, on 22–4 Nov. 2007 (schedule available at

It remains to be seen, as part of a future study, whether the letters and statements of the executed leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising, published as a book in 1971, belong to this culture of prison writings peculiar to the Irish republican movement.⁴⁶

www.univ-brest.fr/Recherche/Laboratoire/CRBC/photo/Programme%20IRLANDE2.pdf, accessed 5 June 2008. Laurence McKeown, "'Casualties of war' or 'agents of change': Irish republican prisoners, Maze/Long Kesh Prison, 1972–2000' in Olivier Coquelin et al. (eds), *Political ideology in Ireland: from the Enlightenment to the present* (Newcastle, 2009), pp 274–82. ⁴⁶ Piaras F. Mac Lochlainn (ed.), *Last words: letters and statements of the leaders executed after the rising at Easter 1916* (Dublin, 2005, orig. 1971).