
What Is Sinn Féin?

The American System versus British Geopolitics in Ireland

by Paul Gallagher

This article originally appeared in The New Federalist on Jan. 9, 1995, on the occasion of the historic peace agreement reached between Northern Ireland and the British government. Recent events in Ireland, in which the monarchy's Inter-Alpha Group of banks is attempting to impose a financial-economic dictatorship over the Irish people, have drawn hundreds of thousands into the streets in protest, once again, against the British imperial power.

With a ceasefire in Northern Ireland after 25 years of civil war, Her Majesty's government of John Major has now put up a hasty "conference on investment in Northern Ireland" and tried to exclude *only* Sinn Féin, the Irish party of independence. The British hope that affronts to Sinn Féin will provoke IRA violations of the ceasefire and destroy the peace process.

The Clinton Administration, which sponsored the ceasefire, has planned a more serious conference on Irish economic development for April 1995, in Philadelphia, and has repeatedly infuriated London by granting visas to Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams to help plan a policy of peace through development.

Events are thus closely paralleling those of 1920-21. Then, the Irish nationalist movement led by Sinn Féin, with backing in America, forced His Majesty George V's government of Prime Minister David Lloyd George to cease military operations and sign a treaty recognizing the sovereignty of the Irish Free State (minus the six Northern counties of Ulster).

This time, however, Irish peace negotiations can join the ongoing Mideast negotiations for peace through economic development, to point all nations toward the development of "Great Projects" of infrastructure across Eurasia, to rebuild the world economy from depression. This time, the Clinton White House is trying to support steps against British geopolitics in the Mid-



Arthur Griffith, "the founder of the Irish state," and of the nationalist party Sinn Féin. He fought for a sovereign nation-state based on natural law, as expressed through a Constitution.



east, Ireland, and elsewhere, whereas Woodrow Wilson's Anglophile government, in 1920, told Irish emissaries it "would do nothing in their behalf": the Irish were not the right "Small Minority."¹

It is no accident, that British fury over Clinton's

1. Wilson's 14 Points started with the right of self-determination of small states and minorities.



Friedrich List (left), who brought the American System to Germany, and made Germany a counterpole to Britain, through his 1840s Zollverein (National Customs Union), shown in this map of 1834

Northern Ireland peace policy has centered on the granting of American visas to leading members of Sinn Féin, which today’s media dismiss as a small party, “the political arm of the IRA.” In 1921, Sinn Féin, did to His Majesty’s government, in the full arrogance of victory in World War I, what no Irish movement had done in four centuries: It forced Britain to remove 100,000 armed men from Ireland (and stop 40,000 more on their way), and agree to Irish sovereignty and independence. Sinn Féin’s national movement, its ministers and national parliament—the Dáil Éireann, in which Sinn Féin won 90% of the seats in December 1918—directed the IRA—then called the Irish Volunteers and the only national army Ireland had. London feared and hated Sinn Féin enough that British authorities instantly designated the 1916 Easter uprising, “the Sinn Féin rebellion,” although British Intelligence knew the Sinn Féin leaders had opposed the armed uprising.

A Renaissance Nation-State

The extraordinary 1902-21 accomplishments of Sinn Féin and its founder, Arthur Griffith (1872-1922)—“the founder of the Irish state”—were based on those secrets uniquely responsible for the successful creation of all the nation-states by and since the Euro-

pean Renaissance of the 15th Century. Griffith based Sinn Féin not on “issues,” but on the fundamental principle that natural law, expressed through a Constitution, gives to a people united by a literate language-culture, the inalienable right to national independence and sovereignty, and to economic development as the fruit of science and the contributions of individual citizens.

Griffith insisted upon national unity above all else, in the same way that Abraham Lincoln did during the 1850-65 threat to the American Union. And Griffith fought for the “Harmony of Interests” of capital and

labor—the principle of Gottfried Leibniz’s political economy, of Benjamin Franklin’s and Alexander Hamilton’s “American System,” and of Pope Leo XIII’s great 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Sinn Féin prevailed upon the Marxists in Ireland’s better labor and “land” movements,² as it eventually prevailed over the British looting class.

Griffith was a student of the great German national economist

Friedrich List, who brought the “American System” of economics to Germany, and made Germany a national unity, and a European counterpole to Britain, for the first time, through the 1840s Zollverein (National Customs Union). Griffith introduced List to the startled Irish nationalist circles of 1904 as “the man Britain hated and feared the most.” He introduced List’s economics as the industrial development policy of the future Irish nation.

Griffith and List

To the 1905 Sinn Féin convention, Griffith spoke of List, and on national independence:

“I am in economics largely a follower of the man who thwarted England’s dream of the commercial con-



2. The movement for Irish peasant land ownership arose with some strength in the 1880s and 1890s. Since the 17th Century, the land was mainly owned by English “undertakers” as they were called. After 1708, no Catholic was allowed to own land or vote.

quest of the world, and who made the mighty confederation before which England has fallen commercially and is falling politically—Germany. In Ireland his name is unknown—I refer to Friedrich List, the real founder of the German Zollverein.

“Brushing aside the fallacies of Adam Smith and his tribe, List points out that between the individual and humanity stands, and must continue to stand, a great fact—the nation.

“The nation with its special language and literature, with its peculiar origin and history, with its special manners and customs, laws and institutions, with the claims of all these for existence, perfection, and continuance for the future, and with its separate territory, constitutes a society which, united by a thousand ties of minds and interests, combined itself into one independent whole, which recognizes the law of right for and within itself, and in its united character is still opposed to other societies of similar kind in their national liberty, and consequently can only, under the existing conditions of the world, maintain self-existence and independence by its own power and resources....

“With List I reply [to the British]: ‘A nation cannot promote and further its civilization, its prosperity, and its social progress equally as well by exchanging agricultural products for manufactured goods as by establishing a manufacturing power of its own.’”

From that 1905 convention onward, Sinn Féin’s policy, through its newspaper, *The United Irishmen*, was List’s “American System” of great projects of national infrastructure, tariff protection to national manufacturing interests, and rapid development of the most modern industry, with the renowned shipyards of Belfast as a model.

In this and other striking initiatives, Griffith showed that the deeper root of his nationalist policy was based on a universal power of ideas—not confined to “Irish nationalist ideas”—and on the power of the individual’s mind to be moved by these ideas and hold to them even as a solitary leader. At the founding of Sinn Féin in 1902, Griffith said, “I am not concerned about today. Tomorrow will be ours. Our idea has backers already among the intellectuals and among men and women of faith and wisdom. Their opinions will infiltrate the masses of the nation in time.... If we realize the duties and responsibilities of a citizen and discharge them, we shall win. It is the duty of a free citizen to live so that his country may be the better for his existence.... No man can offer Ireland a speedy and comfortable road to freedom.”

Speaking to the same convention of no more than 100 people, Griffith’s co-founder William Rooney said:

“History has never been made by the millions; the few who sacrificed did all the world is proud of. The silent, earnest thinker moves the mass.... It is necessary that [we] be men whom no danger shall deter and no indifferentism shall discourage; that [we] be men whose love of right and truth alone shall be sufficient to make them persevere and rise superior to all the disillusion which unselfish effort has to face.”

Taken all together, these ideas and policy conceptions of Renaissance for the nation-state, accessed by Griffith and his collaborators to achieve their partial but durable defeat of British geopolitics, represent the ideas and policy-conceptions developed today by Lyndon LaRouche and his political movement and collaborators.

Sinn Féin’s Constitutional Policy

Sinn Féin began in the 1890s as a small literary society with a strong interest in restoring the Irish (Gaelic) language, and in the American Civil War victory over British slavery. It began to confront British geopolitics with Arthur Griffith’s 1897-98 sojourn in South Africa, during which he organized the entire Irish community there to support the Boer state of Paul Kruger and Paul Joubert against the British. Griffith met Kruger, and also Cecil Rhodes (whom Griffith described as “small in brain and heart, and of indescribable manners”). In 1902-04, back in Ireland, Griffith and his collaborators began to use the name Sinn Féin (“We Ourselves”), and to publish *The United Irishmen*; Griffith already thought of the name Sinn Féin in terms of List’s conception of the necessary economic and industrial sufficiency and security of the nation-state.

The century just before Sinn Féin’s launching had been dominated by the 1840s British genocide of more than 2 million, out of 8 million, Irish subjects; and then, by branches of the Young Ireland movement—a part of the Young Europe of British agent Giuseppe Mazzini. Though Griffith greatly respected the two leaders associated with the “Young Ireland” period—Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt—he specifically rejected that method of “Irish obstructionist” leadership, and referred back beyond it, to the Irish independence movement *associated with the American War of Independence*.

For 350 years, beginning in the 1570s, British brutality to Ireland had been unique, even in British imperialism: Many observers over those centuries compared it to the immiseration of African slaves in America and



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British brutality to Ireland had been unique, even for British imperialism: Many observers over those centuries compared it to the immiseration of African slaves in America and the West Indies, always finding the slaves' conditions superior to those of the Irish. Irish manufactures were wiped out, and the land left fallow. Here a Irish woman uses a primitive spinning wheel, ca. 1903; pickets at the White House, in 1920.

the West Indies, always finding the slaves' conditions superior to those of the Irish. Ireland, always a French ally, was the punching bag for savage British geopolitical hatred of France and the Vatican, reflecting, in turn, the British patrimony of Venice's geopolitical hatreds.

As the British slaughtered, starved, and drove out the Irish, they confiscated their land and replaced them with Scottish and English landlords, most heavily in Northern Ulster. Eventually, 80% of all Irish land was confiscated; nearly 30% wound up *completely unused* by 1800.

Only one Irish national independence movement overcame the "religious" and regional antagonisms fostered by British policy: the United Irishmen of the 1780s and 1790s period of the American Revolution. Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* was called "the Koran of the United Irishmen." During the period of French military support of America's War of Independence, decisive French support of the United Irishmen would have had the same successful results, but Louis XVI's Minister, the Comte de Vergennes, backed away. However, the combined force of the American War of Independence and the United Irishmen's efforts, won Ireland the Constitution of 1783, which Britain was forced to recognize by the "Act of Renunciation": The Irish people were then to be bound only by their own Constitution and by laws enacted "by His

Majesty and Parliament of that Kingdom."

Griffith based Sinn Féin's political organizing on the idea that "the objective of all national effort must be the restoration of Ireland to the status of a sovereign state." He sought complete unity for the restoration of the Constitution of 1783: to make Ireland a completely constitutional monarchy, sovereign from England, with full fiscal/economic powers, its own army, national legislature, and sovereign diplomatic relations—but retaining the British monarchy to bring the Royalist sentiment of Ulster into the national fold. To start the process, Sinn Féin called on the Irish-elected members of the *British* Parliament to withdraw from Westminster, to form the basis of an Irish National Assembly with Constitutional legitimacy—and to avoid insurrection and "class struggle."

Twenty years later, over the 1919-21 period, Griffith's constitutional goal was realized as he had laid it out, beginning when the Irish Nationalist MPs withdrew from Westminster after the British announced conscription of the Irish for World War I in 1917. Sinn Féin had, by that time, effectively organized much of the Irish citizenry for neutrality, on the basis of no war without sovereignty. ("Germany is not our enemy. Our blood and our miseries are not on her head.") In addition, it had organized 2,000 local Sinn Féin branches,

organized the elected Local Councils to carry out some judicial and fiscal functions, formed an industrial planning commission under Griffith's personal direction—and was ready to organize election of a Dáil (parliament), field a small army to defend it (the Irish Volunteers), and to raise a national loan for government functions.

Excepting the very brief 1916 uprising, this had been done without insurrection and with a minimum of fighting (most initiated by the huge British and Royal Irish Constabulary forces), and with Sinn Féin and its publications suppressed, during World War I.

The Resurrection of Hungary

Griffith introduced two bold “flanks” in this political front, which were decisive. First, in 1904, he wrote *The Resurrection of Hungary*, which was serialized in *The United Irishmen*, then published as a pamphlet which stayed in wide circulation for 15 years, to the amazement of his colleagues. This work put forth “the Hungarian model” for Irish national sovereignty.

The pamphlet described Hungary's 1849 military defeat and loss of sovereignty to the Hapsburg Empire; its 1861 refusal to send its representatives to the Council of the Empire; the long resistance led by Francis Deak, who, for years, under martial law, went on telling everyone that the Hungarian Constitution was still in force. In 1876, Hungarian sovereignty was again recognized in a “dual monarchy”—Griffith's goal for Ireland.

This appeal to Irish citizens' sense of *universal history* exercised a very wide and completely unexpected influence in the preparations for Irish independence by Sinn Féin. The “dual monarchy” idea had, in the first place, been taken from Leibniz's collaborator, Jonathan Swift.

Second, Griffith directly attacked William Pitt the Younger and Lord Castlereagh, pet ministers of that Lord Shelburne who deployed Hume, Smith, Malthus, Bentham, Gibbon, et al. against the American Revolution and its influence.

The Irish MPs were sitting in Westminster, said



Griffith, in 1904, wrote *The Resurrection of Hungary*, which was serialized in *The United Irishman* (a copy from 1969 shown here); then published as a pamphlet, which put forth “the Hungarian model” for Irish national sovereignty.

Griffith, only because the Irish Constitution of 1783 was torn up by Prime Minister Pitt's monstrous 1801 Act of Union, which designated Ireland as part of Britain. This completely illegitimate act was passed only when Pitt and Castlereagh blackmailed, threatened, and purchased nearly all members of the Irish Parliament in Dublin. Griffith quoted the letter of Lord Cornwallis, who, in 1801, had gone from surrendering in America to the post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland—“I despise and hate myself every hour for engaging in such corrupt work.” He denounced “the British Parliament—that deadly institution . . . into whose partnership Pitt bribed you and dragged you by force of arms.”

This powerful historical exposé upset the Irish popular idea that they were an oppressed or neglected “part of Great Britain.” Pitt's infamous “Union”

was overcome by Sinn Féin, as it had not been by Parnell, Davitt's Land League, and Disraeli's “Home Rule” games in the 19th Century.

In the 1921 treaty event, Ireland became a sovereign republic, not a constitutional “dual monarchy,” because Sinn Féin ultimately failed to save the six Northern counties of Ulster from a British Tory—Scottish Rite freemasonic—campaign of violence and terror.

The Protestant-Catholic unity and harmony forged by the United Irishmen in the 1780s lasted a century, across “class lines” of Protestant “Scotch-Irish” landlords and Catholic tenants in Ulster. Then, in the 1880s, when Arthur Griffith was a teenager, Tory leaders Lord Randolph Churchill (father of Winston) and Lord Balfour, decided to “play the Orange card” (in Churchill's phrase) against Irish Home Rule. British King William of Orange's 1691 invasion of Ulster had established the Grand Orange Lodge of Scottish Rite Freemasonry among the Scottish-descended landlord and commercial classes of Ulster. First Churchill in 1886, then Balfour in 1888, travelled personally to Belfast with money to organize Orange Protestant (landlord) violence against Catholics. They signed up 73,000 Orange Vol-

unteers under Churchill's slogan, worthy of today's Jesse Jackson: "Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right." Churchill and Balfour set off repeated attempts at "pogroms" to drive Catholics from Belfast, deploying the Orange Masonic lodges as a paramilitary terror force. "Bloody Balfour" had 24 Irish MPs arrested and held as common criminals.

This was the launching of the Protestant-Catholic violence in Ulster which continued for a century under London's control, which the current ceasefire seeks to end through economic development.

"The Orange card" of Churchill was played over and over, from 1876 to 1918, until, by World War I, even the British government command in Ireland—"Dublin Castle"—was dominated by the Orange Order. Finally, in 1915, desperate to stop the ongoing Irish "government-building" by Sinn Féin, and having felt the insufficiency of her 80,000 regular soldiers in Ireland, her 20,000 whiskey-loaded "Black-and-Tans" special forces killers, her thousands of Royal Irish Constabulary—Britain began to openly arm the Ulster Volunteers. This time Winston Churchill, that keen "historian" of Ireland, was directly involved.

It was to this that Sinn Féin and the Dáil Éireann responded, by calling for the expansion and arming of the Irish Volunteers, attempting to associate the Irish Volunteers with the Ulster Volunteers as a national defense force. But in 1918, London, through the Orange Order, organized a new pogrom driving thousands of Catholic refugees from Belfast. Griffith realized that "the chief promoters of Orange intolerance are the heads of the distributing trade throughout Ireland"—bankers and large merchants—and Sinn Féin responded with a boycott of the Belfast banks. But, in 1921, Griffith and his Dáil Éireann delegation had to agree to a treaty establishing Irish sovereignty without Ulster and the modern industries of Belfast.

The American System

Arthur Griffith's industrial policy for Sinn Féin, based on his mentor Friedrich List, was the constantly developing nucleus of Sinn Féin's work. Griffith's speech to the 1905 Convention was on the survey of Irish productivity and the creation of a Zollverein among Ireland's elected Local Councils. He said that Ireland's chief industry, agriculture, had been looted of its product to England, and its cultivated acreage was constantly decreasing. He called on the Councils to become "stations" for agricultural improvement, but said the nation must rise from its agricultural state by a system of tariff



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In 1905, Griffith said that Ireland's chief industry, agriculture, had been looted by England, and that the nation must rise from its agricultural state by a system of tariff protection and development of home industries. Shown: a sheep fair in Killarney, 1901.

protection and development of home industries. He quoted List that an agricultural nation is always dependent; an agro-industrial nation is independent.

Ireland having, in 1904, no fiscal powers, Griffith called for Local Councils to spend tax money only on goods made in Ireland, and for the harbor boards to make port dues fall heavily on imported manufactures, not food. (At that time as still today, Ulster was *not industrialized* outside Belfast, Ireland's main port and industrial center.) Griffith also spelled out the necessity of creating an Irish merchant marine (destroyed by the English Navy in the 16th Century); a national civil service, arbitration courts and a National Council to coordinate the Local Councils' actions; reforestation of Ireland's once-extensive hardwood forests (cut down *en masse* by English landlords in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries). The idea of boycotting British industrial goods was raised by placing on the masthead of *The United Irishmen* the slogan of Jonathan Swift in the 1720s: "Burn everything English except their coal."

At Sinn Féin's 1907 Convention, after its first candidates had stood for Parliament (pledging not to attend), and gained about 20% of the votes, Griffith developed a fuller Listian program. Sinn Féin now called for infrastructure development: canals for cheap freight, roads,



“If the Irish today wish to prevail over the collapsing House of Windsor and, more importantly, over its policies of usury and destabilization across Eurasia, they should support the greatest economist of the American System”—Lyndon LaRouche. 1890s caricature of Americans kicking out the British in 1776; Uncle Sam cheers as George Washington gives the boot to John Bull.

electrical power, and the urgent development of fisheries and harbors. The boycott of British goods was now seriously demanded by this still-tiny political force.

In 1908, Griffith brought out *The Irish Year Book (Leabhar na h-Éireann)*, published by Sinn Féin’s National Council, with 400 pages on Irish resources, skills, inventions, educational institutions, and interests. Its purpose, he wrote, was to build the Harmony of Interests: “Unionist and anti-Unionist, Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian, Methodist, Quaker, the northern manufacturer and the southern agriculturalist, workman and employer, artisan and farmer, landowner and tenant—all are here offering the result of their study of their experience to help the country.”

India’s founding father Jawaharlal Nehru later said that his policy for Indian independence of *swadeshi* (boycott of British goods and development of Indian production) was based on his observation of Sinn Féin in this period, when Nehru lived in London as a graduate student.

During the 1913 strike/lockout of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, led by socialists James Larkin and James Connolly (the latter a friend and collaborator of Griffith), Griffith wrote in *The*

United Irishmen the virtual words of Franklin, Lincoln, or Pope Leo XIII:

“I deny that Capital and Labour are in their nature antagonistic—I assert that they are essential and complementary to each other. The incentive and right of both is the profit of production, and the security of one and the efficiency of the other are essential to national prosperity. . . . It is the duty of the organized nation to protect Labour, and to secure for it the profits of production, not a mere competitive wage. . . . The free nation I desire to see rise again on the soil of Ireland is no offspring of despair—no neo-feudalism with Marx and Lassalle and Proudhon its prophets.”

Finally, in 1919, Griffith’s pursuit of List’s Zollverein became the Dáil Éireann’s “Select Commission to inquire into the National Resources and present conditions of Manufacturing and Productive Industries in Ireland,

and . . . by what means those Industries may be encouraged and extended and those Natural Resources more fully developed.” Griffith, of course, headed the Commission, with special committees on power, textiles, minerals, and food.

Under Griffith, this became a permanent institution of Irish government, independent of party. Indeed, Griffith wrote that “Sinn Féin is not a party. It is a national composition. . . . We must sink ourselves, that the nation may gain from our unity.” He published continuously, even journals from prison when *The United Irishmen* was suppressed. His newspapers were devoted “to the disciplining of the mind and the training of the forces of the nation . . . nothing but the weapons of the free man. If we realize this conception of citizenship in Ireland—if we place our duty to our country before our personal interests, and live not each for himself but each for all, the might of England cannot prevent our ultimate victory.”

If the Irish today wish to prevail over the collapsing House of Windsor and, more importantly, over its policies of usury and destabilization across Eurasia, they should support the greatest economist of the American System—Lyndon LaRouche.