

# “Up to the Sun and Down to the Centre:” The Utopian Moment in Anticolonial Nationalism

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**ABSTRACT:** The ideology and practice of James Fintan Lalor is examined as a geographical imagination in the service of anticolonial nationalism. The utopian and forward-looking aspects of nationalism have not received as much attention as the retrospective emphasis upon the restoration of past glories. Yet in anticolonial nationalism, the question of what an independent state could achieve incites a utopian moment and links nationalism to a more universalist discourse concerning justice.

## Anticolonial nationalism and young Ireland

In *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, Benedict Anderson explored the ways that anticolonial struggle produces intellectual insights that anticipate a utopian future.<sup>1</sup> In developing their criticisms of the social and economic disabilities required by colonial rule, anticolonial theorists must imagine ways that social, economic and political life might be better ordered. One implication of Anderson’s analysis, according to Amrith and Sluga, is that the United Nations “would have been unthinkable without the intellectual labor of Asian radical nationalists, who appropriated elements of European thought but transcended the racial exclusions inherent within them.”<sup>2</sup> Not all anticolonial thought is this creative, and on occasion it amounts to little more than a passionate wish to expel the colonial power. Furthermore, the anticolonial imagination is also fed by the utopianism that animates other political struggles such as those around class, political representation, and freedom of expression. Nevertheless, some anticolonial thought is clearly emancipatory in its own right. Robert Young found among anticolonial theorists, such as Franz Fanon, some of the earliest and most trenchant of attacks upon the grand narratives of the Rise of the West and upon the racist imaginaries that sustain the arrogance of colonial rule.<sup>3</sup> The American revolutionaries of the eighteenth century rallied around the slogan, “No taxation without representation,” and although they claimed to be doing little more than asserting their rights as free-born British subjects, they were, argued Grant Dorfman, proposing a new basis for government that could find no legal answer under British rule, colonial or otherwise: “The implausibility of their case doomed all efforts to gain redress within the system and drove events towards their ultimate impasse.”<sup>4</sup> The rights they wanted to assert could be realized only under a new sovereign dispensation. The justifications for the fight against colonialism can thus project a radically new society.

In 1994, launching the journal, *Nations and Nationalism*, Anthony Smith suggested that: “Perhaps the central question in our understanding of nationalism is the role of the past in the creation of the present.”<sup>5</sup> National ideologies often have a historicist hue and this may explain why the utopian and progressive elements of nationalism receive comparatively little attention and why scholars, such as Smith, glance ever backwards. Certainly, many Irish nationalists presented themselves as anxious to restore a pre-colonial society, pure in its authentic Irishness. In *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, John Hutchinson drew upon the Irish example to examine the bases and purposes of this ideology and he has proposed more recently that this form of

nationalism seeks “the defense and activation of the historical community,” as well as “a moral regeneration of the national community by returning to the spirit of its ancient past encoded in its myths, memories and culture.”<sup>6</sup> Hutchinson was unhappy with the notion that this was little more than the opportunistic “invention of tradition” identified by scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm,<sup>7</sup> but he also accepted that the nationalists he had studied were often “reformers in conservative dress. They seek to use tradition to legitimate social innovation [...] building on indigenous traditions rather than [...] obliterating them.”<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, too, noted the paradox that the most radical of revolutionaries often choose to appear in antic clothing: “[J]ust as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.”<sup>9</sup>

In this paper, I want to examine some elements of social innovation associated with the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s. The early decades of the nineteenth century was a time when religious discrimination was the focus of anti-British energies in Ireland. A broad-based campaign for political liberties and the right of an Irish parliament to legislate for an Irish people had produced an unsuccessful rebellion in 1798. The subsequent dissolution of the Irish parliament and the enforced Union under the British crown demoralized nationalists. The campaign to remove the civil disabilities of Catholics revived political organization and discourse in Ireland but, insofar as it challenged British domination, it did so in the name of Irish Catholics and thus risked anticipating a distinctly confessional tone for an independent Ireland. Nevertheless, its concern with tithes, the taxation of land to support the established Protestant church, raised more general issues about the propriety of property. By questioning the legality of the Protestant establishment, the Irish anti-tithe movement begged wider questions about the legitimacy of the colonial state. These matters were brought to the fore when Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847) split with the English Whig party and agitated separately as an Irish organization for the repeal of the Union. With a series of mass meetings in 1842 and 1843, O’Connell marched a good share of the Irish polity up the hill of defiance. In October 1843, O’Connell promised a mass meeting for Clontarf, the site of a battle where in 1014 Brian Boru had led an Irish army to victory against Viking invaders. The British government declared the meeting to be insurrectionary and, in submitting to the ban, O’Connell not only deflated his movement but also alienated its more radical thinkers: those who were reflecting upon the interdependence of economic and political questions.

The relations between property and state formed the colonial political economy of Ireland, and in taking up these matters, nationalists could be some distance from the matters of genealogy and descent that are part of the historical narrative of nationalism, at least as reported by scholars such as Smith. Instead, this nationalist imaginary describes a political geography for the relations between Britain and Ireland, and between urban and rural Ireland. These anxieties about property and the state shaped the development of the Young Ireland movement and the cultural and political renaissance it developed through its journal, *The Nation*.<sup>10</sup> It was called Young Ireland because many of its leaders shared with Giuseppe Mazzini’s Young Italy movement of the 1830s and 1840s a belief that force of arms would be necessary and justified to dislodge imperial rule and establish an independent republic. Young Ireland broke with O’Connell’s movement for Repeal of the Union, which, under pressure from the Catholic bishops, had resolutely disavowed any sort of violent insurrection.

Daniel O’Connell, himself, was no stranger to violent rhetoric, nor even to evoking the threat of a revolution averted by himself alone.<sup>11</sup> In 1840, speaking at a meeting of his Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland, O’Connell referred in the following terms to the revolutionary potential of the Catholic priests then in training at St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth:

While I live, and my influence remains unbroken, [nothing ...] shall induce us to commit a breach of the peace; but it depends upon a single life, and when I rest in the tomb that course may not be pursued (hear, hear). I had seen yesterday the boys of Maynooth, whose blood was boiling in their veins, and they asked me would not their country be free (hear)? When they grow into manhood, having served their apprenticeship in the service of old Ireland—when, I say, they grow into manhood, they will not act as their fathers did, who were born slaves and lived in habits of submission; but they being brought into the world free, will insist on freedom for their country (cheers). [... T]he wrongs inflicted may swell the bubbling current of the warm blood of young Ireland, and will not consent to any species of slavery (cheers).<sup>12</sup>

Later O’Connell came to use the term “Young Ireland” in a more derisory manner to refer to those not willing to join him in abjuring all violence. When he insisted that all must publicly disavow violence at a meeting of the Repeal Association, he did so in very clear terms: “Formerly every change was effected by physical force, but he had inculcated the doctrine that force and violence injure the holiest cause, and that the greatest political advantages are not worth one drop of blood.”<sup>13</sup> O’Connell recognized that recent political change had often been effected by revolution, but this was something he decried, specifically charging that in place after place: “A sort of Young Ireland party sprung up, who succeeded in creating revolution after revolution.”<sup>14</sup> O’Connell could not have been more explicit: “I draw up this resolution to draw a marked line between Young Ireland and Old Ireland (cheers). I do not accept the services of any man who does not agree with me both in theory and in practice.”<sup>15</sup> O’Connell’s own influence, as very likely he saw it, depended upon being the one who could deliver social peace in return for political concessions towards independence.

First by virtue of a sort of religious test, acknowledging the authority of the Catholic bishops of Ireland, and then by foreswearing any resort to violence, O’Connell alienated Young Ireland from his Repeal Association. Yet Young Ireland continued to engage with matters of land and state, the central concerns of the Catholic movements of the first decades of the nineteenth century. Its differences with O’Connell incited Young Irelanders to a more systematic engagement with the political economy of colonialism and with the desirable forms of a postcolonial social contract. In this paper, I focus upon the emancipatory thought of James Fintan Lalor (1807-49), the Young Irelander who took these speculations furthest and perhaps gave most to political economy and political science.

### **Lalor’s reputation**

The posthumous influence ascribed to Lalor is remarkable. A fellow Young Irelander described him as “one of the most powerful political writers that ever took pen in hand.”<sup>16</sup> He has been credited with devising the organizational form that was the essence of Fenianism, otherwise known as the insurrectionary Irish Republican Brotherhood. Of the Head Centre of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, James O’Connor wrote that “[a]dopting the plan of a secret revolutionary organization sketched out by James Fintan Lalor, [...] James Stephens [1825-1901] gave it practical shape, and started single-handed to establish it in the four Provinces of Ireland.”<sup>17</sup> With his elaboration of the notion that being limited in supply, land would ever be a natural monopoly, Lalor has been offered as the source of Henry George’s (1839-1907) proposal of a single tax on the unimproved value of land, as set out in *Progress and Poverty*.<sup>18</sup> The cultural nationalist Standish O’Grady (1846-1908) described Lalor as one who believed in the common ownership of land, and he saw this theory as passing with John Mitchel (1815-1875) to the United States, “propagating itself there in the Irish-American press, and from America it has come back upon Europe, advertising itself as ‘Progress and Poverty.’”<sup>19</sup>

The most radical agrarian movement in nineteenth-century Ireland was the Land League, and Lalor was acknowledged as primary inspiration by both its primary Irish strategist, Michael Davitt (1846-1906), and by its principal American supporter, John Devoy (1842-1928). Davitt was clear that: "There was no real revolutionary mind in the '48 period except Lalor's."<sup>20</sup> Although David Buckley has suggested that in giving credit to Lalor, Davitt was seeking to "retrospectively legitimize" his own conclusions, the standing of Lalor is evident in the effort.<sup>21</sup> Davitt acknowledged as Lalor's singular contribution, the insight that the remedy for Irish starvation lay in an attack upon landlordism via a "strike against rent,"<sup>22</sup> and Davitt characterized the "agrarian revolution of the Land League" as an attack upon "rent tyranny."<sup>23</sup> John Devoy, in turn, also recognized that "James Fintan Lalor might be said to be the real Father of Fenianism, as well of the Land League."<sup>24</sup>

Turning to the revolutionaries of 1916, Pádraig Pearse (1879-1916) proposed that "[t]he conception of an Irish nation has been developed in modern times chiefly by four great minds,"<sup>25</sup> and he included Lalor as one of these four who "have thought most authentically for Ireland, [whose] voices [...] have come out of the Irish struggle itself."<sup>26</sup> The most resonant encomium to Lalor came from James Connolly (1868-1916), himself the leading socialist theorist of early twentieth-century Ireland, who, when writing of the Young Ireland movement, concluded that: "[T]he palm of honour for the clearest exposition of the doctrine of revolution, social and political, must be given to James Fintan Lalor."<sup>27</sup> Connolly admired him for, "like all the really dangerous revolutionists of Ireland, [Lalor] advocated his principles as part of the creed of the democracy of the world, and not merely as applicable only to the incidents of the struggle of Ireland against England."<sup>28</sup> It is this reaching towards more general principles of justice and fairness that grounds the utopian ambition of some versions of anticolonial nationalism, and this ambition to universalism echoes the service to global human rights that Benedict Anderson identified in the nationalists he studied in *Under Three Flags*. A final testimony to the appetite for Lalor's ideas is provided by Éamon de Valera (1882-1975) who, when giving a radio broadcast that went live not only to the residents of the Irish Free State but also to the Irish in North America, and which followed the entry of Fianna Fáil into government after a decade of abstention, declared that, for expressing the policy of his new administration, he knew "no words [...] better than those of Fintan Lalor: 'Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky.'"<sup>29</sup>

### **Lalor, father and son**

James Fintan Lalor was born to a family with a large farm of about one thousand English acres, at Tenakill, county Laois. His father Patrick Lalor (1781-1856) was a fervent supporter of Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Association and a radical opponent of the tithe. These two elements of Catholic liberation led the father to explore the relations between land and state in ways that suggested, although he personally refused, the radical conclusions later reached by his son. Patrick Lalor understood refusing to pay the tithe as the use of moral rather than physical force since the law anticipated refusal by providing for a penalty. As he explained to a parliamentary committee investigating the system of tithes: "I considered it a debt not morally binding; that if the law allowed the nonpayment of it, I conceive there was no moral obligation to enforce it."<sup>30</sup> The penalty was that the local Church of Ireland vicar could enforce payment by distraint of goods. In this case, in 1831, Rev. Latouche made a claim for the tithe due to him and upon Lalor's refusal to pay, Latouche obtained twenty ewes and their lambs from Lalor. However, Lalor branded the word "tithe" on the side of each animal and no local purchaser could be found. Nor was a purchaser to be found in Dublin, Liverpool or Manchester and, indeed, as Lalor reported with some relish, no "salesmaster would allow them on his standing; nor a bit of food would the poor animals get, until they actually died of starvation, some in Liverpool and the rest of them in Manchester."<sup>31</sup>

In 1832, on the back of the popularity of his having defied the tithe, and taking advantage of the 1829 Catholic Emancipation that opened parliamentary representation to Catholics, Patrick Lalor ran for election against local landowners and headed the poll.<sup>32</sup> At the next election (1835), the tenants of the landlord, under threat of eviction, mustered once again behind their master, and Lalor's tenure at Westminster was terminated. Patrick Lalor was appalled at this abuse of landowner power and this surely explains the following note about his parliamentary career that was published in 1847 in the *Nation*: "P. Lalor. An honest man. Retired in disgust."<sup>33</sup>

As a Catholic, Lalor considered the tithe, going as it did to support Protestant clergy, "a great hardship, [...] inasmuch as I receive no value for it."<sup>34</sup> Lalor was aware of local opposition to tithes "for time immemorial" and remarked that they had been "the cause of much bloodshed in [Laois] particularly so far as related to the White Boys," the agrarian rebels, and indeed "[a] great number of people have been from time to time executed for the illegal conduct they pursued, in striving to rid themselves of that impost of tithe."<sup>35</sup> At a meeting of the Repeal Association held in Mayborough (now Portlaoise) in January 1831, he had announced his intention to refuse henceforth to pay the tithe and this ejaculation had produced a more general defiance throughout the county of Laois. This defiance was spread beyond Laois, for posters addressing the "Tithe Payers of Ireland" appeared at least in Kildare and probably other places too. On this poster were given extracts from Lalor's speech advising others how to defy the tithe: "I will never again pay tithe: I will obstruct no law. The tithe owner will, of course, distrain my goods; but my countrymen esteem me, I am proud to say, and I do not think there is one amongst them will, under such circumstances, buy my goods so distrained and offered for sale."<sup>36</sup> Lalor's form of civil disobedience was modeled on the actions of the Quakers: "I had been for years before thinking within my own mind that there was every facility to avoid the payment of tithes, if the people were only unanimous, and acted peaceably, as the society called Quakers did."<sup>37</sup> In Patrick Lalor's argument over the tithe, then, there was an appeal to justice based on the failure of people to benefit from payments that they made, and there was, as a tactic, a refusal to pay what was considered an unjust impost.

The Repeal Association was also the context in which Patrick Lalor developed further arguments about the justice issues attending rent and land tenure. At a meeting of the Repeal Association in Castletown in 1843, he moved a motion "advocating fixity of tenure. He spoke with great force of the evils resulting to Ireland from the precarious nature of the tenure of land, and gave a powerful exposition of its disastrous results."<sup>38</sup> In 1844, to the Devon Commission on "The Occupation of Land in Ireland," Patrick Lalor explained some of the links between tenure and religion. Speaking of the county of Laois, he reported that: "[T]he tenures in this country are almost invariably at will. It was always too much the case, but about eleven years ago a meeting of the landlords (or very many of them) took place, at which they entered into a solemn promise or engagement with each other not to give any lease in future to a Catholic."<sup>39</sup> In other words, Protestant landlords had resolved to offer Catholics no security of tenure, reserving the right to evict them "at will." Patrick Lalor went on to argue that this opposition was political first and religious only as a secondary consideration. It was because Catholic tenants accepted voting direction from their local Catholic parish priest rather than from their Protestant landlord, that these landlords sought more servile tenants.

Evidence before a Select Committee on Bribery at Elections provides more context for this and makes clear the difficulty of separating religion from politics in matters relating to land. One witness claimed that a Catholic shopkeeper who in 1835 had voted for the ticket of the two Protestant landowners, Charles Coote and Thomas Vesey, found himself named on a public notice which alleged that he "gave his vote to Coote, sold his country, denied Christ and his church, perjured himself, and joined the Orangemen. I hope you neighbours will all take notice of this,

and withdraw your custom from him."<sup>40</sup> Making clear the intimate relations between religious and political contention, another list of the Catholics who voted for Coote and Vesey was headed, "A List of the tithes supporters who voted for Coote and Vesey and against the people."<sup>41</sup> At one public meeting Patrick Lalor himself moved the following motion:

That whilst we are determined to support those honest freeholders who may be oppressed for the honest exercise of their franchise by persecuting landlords, who, not content with extracting the last penny that can be made from the soil, also seek to turn to their own base purposes the franchise intrusted to the people for the public good: also pledge ourselves not to hold neighbourship, to have any dealing whatsoever with those persons who shall by their votes inflict the deadly injury on the country of returning Tory conservatives for this county.<sup>42</sup>

When he was asked about the "non-dealing" with those who voted Conservative rather than Liberal, Lalor claimed that in the face of the threats of eviction, the people had "no other mode of protecting themselves [...] and a very effectual one it is, [...] and I think a very legitimate one."<sup>43</sup>

Lacking reasonable security of title, the Catholic tenants would not make improvements because they could not be sure they would get the benefit: "With regard to the occupation of land in Ireland I have been always of opinion [...] that the practice and the law ought to be that every man, when he gets possession of land ought to have it for ever."<sup>44</sup> Beyond this, he would have set the rent at a certain amount of corn per acre so that the tenant got the benefit of any improvements made. Fixity of tenure and some means of restraining the landlord from appropriating improvements through raising rent were to become central concerns of the Land League in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Patrick Lalor went further into legal philosophy when he argued that there was no absolute right in private property:

Before any landlord or tenant had any individual interest [...] in the land it belonged to the state. The state transferred certain rights in the land, but not an unrestricted or unlimited ownership; it transferred it subject to the support of the state in the shape of taxation, subject to have any of it re-occupied by the state which may be found necessary, and above all, it was transferred saddled with the support of the population.<sup>45</sup>

Private property in land, then, was considered by Patrick Lalor to be a conditional right and crucially its legitimacy hinged upon how efficacious were the legal and tenurial arrangements: "If the land be neglected, and not made to yield its capable produce through the mal-construction or inefficiency of the law between landlord and tenant, the state has an undoubted right to step in and regulate the law and practice."<sup>46</sup> The argument for fixity of tenure, then, was that only this would "induce the occupier of land to improve it so as to make it yield its full powers (without which the state is defrauded of part of its just rights)."<sup>47</sup> This utilitarian approach to property and tenure contributed to a wider debate concerning the political economy of Ireland, but Patrick's own contribution was constrained by his loyalty to Daniel O'Connell and his abhorrence of violence of any kind.

### **Social versus political reform**

The relations between father and son are of interest here insofar as they shed light upon the distinctive features of James Fintan's own ideas. James was the eldest of eleven sons and one daughter. He was afflicted with some curvature of the spine "which retarded his growth, and

prevented his attaining the enormous proportions of his big brothers."<sup>48</sup> As a weakly child he was educated at home, where his mother "fitted up an attic study for him, where he could be away from the noise and horse-play of his sturdy brothers, and enjoy to the full the peace and quiet which he craved. She also stood between him and the practical notions of his sturdy father."<sup>49</sup> At the age of 17, James attended for a single year at Carlow College excelling at Classics and Chemistry, prompting his father to secure his apprenticeship to a local medical man, Dr. Jacob, who prepared him further in Chemistry perhaps with a view to his taking up a medical degree.<sup>50</sup> At some time during 1827, he terminated this apprenticeship. At this point he may have gone away from home. Certainly, he was back at Tenakill in time for his father's election in 1832 and thereafter he more or less managed the household during the three years of his father's absence at Westminster.<sup>51</sup> However, while his younger brothers were reported as campaigning for the father on both the anti-tithe agitation and the related parliamentary campaign, James made no such appearance.

James aligned himself with the social and economic campaign of a land reformer, William Conner, rather than with the political campaigns led by Daniel O'Connell. Conner argued that tenants could never flourish without "the State's abridging the landlord's power over the land."<sup>52</sup> He argued that tenants needed security (or fixity) of tenure together with fair rents established by arbitration. He had reached these conclusions in 1833 and promoted this cause in fair weather and foul for the next eighteen years and initially at least he had the full support of James Fintan Lalor. He did not enjoy the same either from the leaders of the Repeal movement or from those of Young Ireland. Daniel O'Connell made a show of committing the Repeal movement to fixity of tenure but, treating property rights with great tenderness, he opposed the setting of rents by arbitration and his version of the fixity of tenure was punctured with so many qualifications that it leaked all radical implication. In 1843, after Conner had advocated a rent strike to force landlords to concede fixity and fair valuation, O'Connell expelled him from the Repeal Association.<sup>53</sup> A government inquiry into the Irish land question, popularly named after its chair the Devon Commission, published in 1845 a mountain of evidence that in Ireland, given the police and military powers they could rely upon, landlords could collect rents that amounted to extortion.<sup>54</sup> This encouraged the Young Ireland movement and its journal, the *Nation*, to endorse fixity of tenure but it too rejected the coercive setting of rents by arbitration.

By 1845, however, James had parted from Conner. Lalor was exploring a range of ways that tenants, small farmers and laborers might see an improvement in their circumstances and was involved with various agricultural cooperatives in pursuit of something like a credit union for rural folk.<sup>55</sup> To Conner this was a deviation and when, in 1847, Lalor called a meeting to create a tenant society at Holycross, Tipperary, Conner not only showed up to heckle but mounted the platform: "The two men came to blows and the platform collapsed under them; the meeting broke up in disorder, with Conner speaking from the ruined platform while Lalor's supporters chaired him to the nearest pub."<sup>56</sup> Lalor later returned to Conner's principles and even to the tactic of rent strike, but this was part of a more comprehensive rethinking of the colonial basis of landlordism than Conner had offered. Before this, Lalor had one further disillusion to suffer.

An article he wrote on agricultural cooperation may have precipitated a crisis with his father, and O'Neill suggests that this was the occasion for James leaving home in January 1844.<sup>57</sup> Some months previously, James had sent an astonishing letter to the British Prime Minister, Robert Peel. He placed his faith in Peel, in landlords, and in the British Conservatives. In the letter he offered to betray his father's political ambitions. Lalor argued that social peace was necessary before there could be social and economic improvement in Ireland. To that end, he considered the Repeal agitation pernicious:

I was, myself, at one time something more than a mere Repealer, in private feeling—but Mr. O'Connell, his agitators, and his series of wretched agitations, first disgusted me into a conservative in point of feeling, and reflection and experience have convicted me into one in point of principle. I have been driven into the conviction, more strongly confirmed by every day's experience, that it is only to a Conservative Government, to her landed proprietors, and to peace that this country can look for any improvement in her social condition.<sup>58</sup>

He introduced himself as the son of "Mr. P. Lalor [...] who then was, and I regret to say, still continues, a zealous and active Repealer," and adds that "my family-friends are all violent Repealers."<sup>59</sup> It is clear from the letter that James Fintan Lalor's primary aim was an "improvement in [Ireland's] social condition," and that, at this time, he thought it might come from "her landed proprietors."<sup>60</sup> Given his father's experience in 1835, when the local Protestant landlord threatened tenants with eviction rather than allow them to vote for the Catholic candidate, it was the wish begat the fact when Lalor affected to believe that the landlords in Ireland could be persuaded to a historic compromise with their tenants. Lalor considered the major obstacle to such an arrangement was landlord fear of the violence threatened by elements of the Repeal movement and for this reason he offered Peel such information about the movement as would aid in its suppression.

Certainly in mid 1843, when Lalor wrote, the British government was worried about violence in Ireland but it is not clear that much of this was related to the Repeal agitation. The first six months of 1843 saw eleven illegal meetings reported by the police, the same in the first half of 1842.<sup>61</sup> Such public assembly offences are part of a continuum of disorderly politics and clearly the sort of thing that Lalor wanted suppressed so that the landlords might feel safe in Ireland and thus willing to take up their civic duty towards their tenants. Taking affray, riot, fights and demonstrations associated with political parties or factions, together with these illegal processions, there were on average 170 such events in each year of the period 1837-45.<sup>62</sup> Far more threatening to landowners and large farmers was a sort of class-war violence with an annual average of 9 assaults on bailiffs, 461 arsons, 585 incidents of cattle-stealing, 292 of the maiming of cattle, 111 of the illegal shearing of sheep, 11 of the destruction of pasture known as turning up land, 21 of pound-breach or the recovering of goods that had been taken in place of unpaid rent, and fully 800 instances each year of threatening letters sent in the main to landlords or farmers judged by popular opinion to have treated harshly their tenants or laborers. This was the sort of violence that was associated with secret agrarian societies such as the Whiteboys and Ribbonism.<sup>63</sup> Over the period 1837-45, there was each year an average of 77 offences relating to the administering of unlawful oaths, 70 where people were apprehended going about armed at night, and there were 209 cases each year of the robbery of or illegal demand made for arms. This class war was about social relations in the countryside and had very little to do with matters of nationalism, tithes, or the repeal of the Union.

Yet it is in the context of the Repeal movement that Lalor told Peel that he had reached a belief in the "absolute necessity which exists, that *all* agitation for political objects should entirely cease, before any improvement can be effected in the condition of the Irish people. I am most anxious that the present Repeal-movement should be speedily and safely suppressed—not imperfectly and for a period, but fully and for ever."<sup>64</sup> Instead of the Irish Repeal Movement, Lalor looks to the British government for assistance: "[I]t is only to a Conservative government, to her landed proprietors, and to *peace* that this country can look for any improvement in her social condition."<sup>65</sup>

Given the doctrines for which Connolly and others admired Lalor, this seems an extraordinary act of faith. The themes of his later work are already here but his conclusions about



these matters had not yet received the shock that rearranged so radically the elements in this kaleidoscope. Despite his differences with Conner, Lalor's emphasis upon social and economic rather than political reform was a shared and constant feature of his thought. Buckley has deftly argued that "economics for Lalor was not a 'political' but a 'social' matter."<sup>66</sup> Lalor was not able at this point to read rural violence as being social in this sense, crediting the Repeal agitation with too much influence over this dispersed aggression towards landlords and the other agents of the landed system.

### The question of violence

Lalor's faith in the landlords soon received two severe tests. When, in the wake of the reports from the Devon Commission, modest reforms were introduced into the British House of Commons, the Irish landlords hooted them out. With a potato blight in Ireland from 1845, Peel opportunistically secured the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, promising cheaper food for Ireland, although he full knew that in the short term scarcity of food would keep prices high. Lalor realized that the removal of the tariff against American grain would see Irish exports to Britain driven from the market and would thus complete the conversion of Ireland from a tillage economy of pigs, grain and potatoes to one of pasture.<sup>67</sup> In this context, landlords wanted to evict their tenants and to take the land back into their own hands for consolidation as grazing. In his pamphlet of 1844, only part of which has survived, Lalor criticized the Repeal press for not appreciating this revolutionary potential of the repeal of the Corn Laws.<sup>68</sup> The famine gave the landlords just this opportunity and, with no thought for the 'fair' rents Lalor advocated, the landlords seemed almost to be making war upon their tenants. Lalor reworked his earlier pamphlet for the new times and in April 1847 accused the landlords of having "doomed a people to extinction and decreed to abolish Ireland," albeit with "the unanimous and cordial support of the people of England."<sup>69</sup>

The famine of 1845-52 was an event of almost unimaginable horror. The subsistence of the majority of the Irish people rotted before it could be eaten. In the summer of 1847, three million people, fully one-third of the population, were surviving on soup provided by government.<sup>70</sup> At that point the British government decided to manage the famine in an unprecedented manner and concluded that the famine could be used to correct Irish economy and society. Comforting itself with the thought that God had a plan that was delivered by nature, the government proceeded to let people die.<sup>71</sup> And over one million did. Perhaps a further one-and-a-half million emigrated.<sup>72</sup> Daniel O'Connell died early in the famine (April 1847) barely nine months after his peace resolutions had driven the Young Irelanders from the movement. Thereafter, Young Ireland had to develop its own philosophy of the legitimate use of violence. In a letter of October 1846 to the *Cork Examiner*, Fr John Kenyon (1812-69) countered O'Connell's blanket dismissal of violence and adverting to the acceptability of capital punishment argued that:

As matters stand, the rejection of everything that could lead to violence or bloodshed is enjoined by no rule of Christian morality. Else could civil government be rejected in the bulk, because civil government not only can lead, but actually and daily does lead, to violence and bloodshed, as the records of Newgate abundantly attest.<sup>73</sup>

In a pamphlet of 1846, *Physical and Moral Force*, Kenyon went further, writing that even popes condoned violence, granting indulgences to crusaders of old. Kenyon conceded that he did "not believe that in point of fact any political rights have been attained during this century for Ireland by moral force alone."<sup>74</sup> Kenyon wrote to the *Nation* in November 1846 with the observation that

"in all cases of controversy in which [O'Connell] was asked to interfere, I think he will have been more generally found on the side of wealth, or power, or title, or dignity."<sup>75</sup> Kenyon directed readers of the *Nation* towards the paired incubi of landlordism and colonialism. In August 1847 he told them that "England was the only nation whose baneful intercourse had robbed Ireland of her wealth and drained all her resources,"<sup>76</sup> and in February 1848 he insisted that: "If [...] the landlord class linked with [the] English interest, persist in opposing themselves to the wishes and wants of our people—say, rather in grinding and crushing them, soul and body, heart and hope,—why should [we] insist upon their company."<sup>77</sup>

This was the tone of debate in the pages of the *Nation* in the months after July 1846 when the Young Irelanders had been driven out of the Repeal Association by the oath of peaceability insisted upon by Daniel O'Connell. In January 1847 they proposed their own organization, the Irish Confederation, and at this point the resolute tone of the *Nation* encouraged James Fintan Lalor to approach its editor, Charles Gavan Duffy (1816-1903) with his new schema for Irish revolution. Lalor was animated by the imminent creation of the Confederation; yet he wanted to ensure that the ends and means of the new body would be acceptable to himself. He did not want the ambition of the new organization to be constrained by the old formula of the Repeal of the Union. He pleaded with Duffy for a more expansive goal: "Call it by some general name— independence if you will."<sup>78</sup> Lalor thought independence could comprise not only the legislative separation promised with a Repeal of the Union, but also an economic independence achieved by expropriating the British landlords. This brings him to his central claim that alongside the legislative independence:

A mightier question is in the land—one beside which Repeal dwarfs down into a petty parish question; one on which Ireland may not try alone her own right, but try the right of the world; on which she would be, not merely an asserter of old principles often asserted, and better asserted before her, an humble and feeble imitator and follower of other countries—but an original inventor, propounder and propagandist, in the van of the earth, and heading the nations; on which her success or her failure alike would never be forgotten by man, but would make her for ever, the lodestar of history.<sup>79</sup>

Here, in essence, was the utopian moment of Young Ireland's anticolonial nationalism. Lalor was inviting the Confederation to attempt a revolution that would have a significance for global civilization equivalent to such caesura as the French Revolution. The parallel was an important one for Lalor. Such a revolution, argued Lalor, was unlikely to be achieved purely by legal means: "[A]ny means and all means might be made illegal by Act of Parliament; and such pledge, therefore, is passive obedience."<sup>80</sup> This was the lesson he drew from O'Connell's failure. When O'Connell had, with his monster meetings, devised an instrument that could threaten British rule, the British government promptly made such meetings illegal and, in complying, O'Connell had set down the lever of civil disobedience with which he might perhaps have moved an Empire. Lalor applauded Young Ireland's refusal to foreswear illegality and even violence but as he urged his own agenda upon them he found many of its leaders committed to insurrection only in principle and not in practice.

### **The practice of revolution**

In one respect, Lalor's letter to Duffy was welcomed by the editor of the *Nation*, who had been encouraging debate about the land question since the publication of the reports of the Devon Commission in 1845. Duffy wanted to induce landowners to acknowledge the dire needs

of their tenants but he detected a whiff of Jacobinism about Lalor's land crusade. He circulated the letter among others in the Confederation and asked Lalor to explain his ideas more fully. In a further three letters, Lalor spelled out his vision of rural revolution. Duffy had seen enough. In a letter of 24 February 1847, he told Lalor that his ideas amounted to "a very bold and clever mistake."<sup>81</sup> Duffy did not believe that a peasant-led revolution was either likely or desirable but he did see the force of the argument that peasants required greater security of tenure. To this extent, Thomas D'Arcy McGee (1825-68) could reassure Lalor on 8 March 1847 that many of the leading Confederates, including Duffy, agreed that the land of Ireland should indeed belong to the people. In reply, Lalor told D'Arcy McGee that his basic principle was quite simple: "The entire ownership of Ireland moral and material up to the sun and down to the centre, is vested by right in the people of Ireland."<sup>82</sup>

The objections to Lalor were theoretical and practical. Mitchel, for example, accepted that Lalor's analysis of the land question was correct in its fundamentals and he told Lalor so.<sup>83</sup> When Lalor published an account of his views in the *Nation* in April 1847, Mitchel urged others, including O'Brien, to read it.<sup>84</sup> O'Brien, however, was not the only person to recoil at Lalor's explicit questioning of property rights. Most believed that it was wrong to imperil an alliance with the landlords by waging social war in the countryside. This was Mitchel's position until late 1847 and thus whereas Lalor called for a rent strike, Mitchel would only contemplate the withholding of poor rates.<sup>85</sup> Many argued that peasants were simply not prepared to rebel. Doherty went out to rural Queen's County (now Laois) to visit Lalor at Abbeyleix: "I could not be persuaded that I had before me, in the poor, distorted, ill-favoured, hunch-backed, little creature, the bold propounder of the singular doctrines in the *Nation* letters."<sup>86</sup> Lalor moved to Dublin and began writing for the *Nation* but he was still unable to win the hearts and minds of the leaders of Confederation to the cause of revolution. He was not even able to convince them to take the first step of advising farmers to refuse to pay rent. Duffy was sure that the peasantry were fatalistic and supine: "Our greatest difficulty was that the largest class, instead of being capable of scientific organisation preferred to lie down and die rather than put themselves in an attitude of self-defence."<sup>87</sup> An exasperated Lalor expostulated to Mitchel: "Egad! Mr Duffy was bred a townsman."<sup>88</sup> Lalor next went out to rural Tipperary to organize among the peasants. He called a meeting of farmers at Holycross "to found a League which should assert the natural property of the people in the soil of the country, and the right of the occupying tenantry to a sufficient subsistence out of the crop, and sufficient seed for next year, superior and prior to every other claim."<sup>89</sup> This was the occasion when Lalor was shouted down by William Conner, who then persuaded the meeting to accept security of tenure and arbitration of rents as sufficient goals.<sup>90</sup>

Two developments gained Lalor a better hearing in Dublin. First, although 39 Repealers had been returned from Ireland to the new British parliament that sat from November 1847, only 17 of them were willing to vote against the introduction of a Coercion Bill for Ireland.<sup>91</sup> For Mitchel this was the ultimate proof of the treachery of the Irish landlords. They stood with the British in defense of their property against the desperate needs of their tenants who could eat only if they withheld the corn that was generally their rent. On 4 January 1848, Mitchel wrote to Lalor: "I am ashamed to be forced to admit, that on the only question we ever differed about I was wholly wrong. Last summer the time had come for giving up the humbug of 'conciliating classes,' winning over landlords to nationality and the rest of it."<sup>92</sup> But as Mitchel grew more revolutionary, he found Duffy increasingly constitutional. In December 1847, Mitchel left the *Nation*. In the Confederation, O'Brien was anxious to distance himself from Mitchel too and a series of debates in January 1848 resulted in resolutions being passed on 5 February 1848 disavowing civil war and the refusal of rents or even poor rates.<sup>93</sup> Mitchel left the Confederation. Mitchel used his own

money to set up the *United Irishman*, the first number of which was published on 12 February 1848.<sup>94</sup> Here, Mitchel expounded what he had learned from Lalor but, after Lalor refused his offer of a job on the journal, Mitchel rarely mentioned him by name.<sup>95</sup>

Alongside the conversion of Mitchel, the second development which gave Lalor’s ideas wider currency was the “intoxication of hope” that followed the February revolution in France.<sup>96</sup> For Duffy and O’Brien, the French rising showed that moderate reformers, such as Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), might govern in the wake of a popular rising, and the Confederation sent O’Brien and Thomas Francis Meagher (1823-67) to Paris with an address praising the revolutionaries’ respect “for religion, private property, and public order.”<sup>97</sup> Others drew more radical lessons. The revolution announced itself as an alliance between those with and those without property, and addressed issues such as the right to work. This mood echoed through Dublin, and the Confederation, “as a deliberate gesture to the new democratic spirit, included a working man in the delegation which was to go to Paris.”<sup>98</sup> By March, many Irish nationalists had persuaded themselves that revolutionary France would be such a threat to Britain that, in order to retain its mainforce for continental battles, Her Majesty’s government would be forced to offer significant concessions to any concerted Irish demands.<sup>99</sup> The rhetoric of Duffy and O’Brien became more insurrectionary as they struggled to remain at the head of a movement that anticipated imminent revolution. Meagher presented the Confederation with a green, white and orange tricolor that had been sent by sympathetic French republicans.<sup>100</sup> Mitchel was ecstatic: “Oh! my countrymen, look up, look up! Arise from the death-dust where you have long been lying, and let this light visit your eyes also, and touch your souls. Let your ears drink in the blessed words, ‘Liberty! Fraternity! Equality!’ which are soon to ring from pole to pole.”<sup>101</sup>

Unlike Lalor, the Confederation held the greatest chance of success to lie in an urban rather than rural revolution. This was where they had organized clubs, thirty in Dublin alone, each with between two hundred and five hundred members but “not one club in the agricultural districts.”<sup>102</sup> Mitchel was brought to trial and on 27 May 1848 was sentenced to fourteen years transportation to a penal colony in Australia for the newly created crime of treason-felony, effectively the preaching of civil war. Meagher and Richard O’Gorman (1826-95) inspected the Dublin clubs to see if they might affect Mitchel’s rescue but found them “unprepared, unorganised, unarmed, and incapable of being even roughly disciplined.”<sup>103</sup> After the sentencing, Mitchel asked the court if he might promise continued defiance from the others present. He “was then removed, and great confusion ensued from the efforts of his friends to shake hands with him.”<sup>104</sup> As Doheny recalled: “Men stood in affright, and looked in each other’s faces wonderingly.”<sup>105</sup> No rescue was attempted and the guilt felt by his friends tightened still further the revolutionary spring: “The transportation of a man as a felon, for uttering sentiments held and professed by at least five-sixths of his countrymen, seemed to me so violent and insulting a national wrong, that submission to it must be taken to signify incurable slavishness.”<sup>106</sup> The suppressed *United Irishman* was replaced by the equally inflammatory *Irish Tribune* and *Irish Felon*. The latter was edited by John Martin (1812-75) and had Lalor as a staff writer. Martin, Duffy and others decided to conspire in the procuring of arms for a rebellion.<sup>107</sup> Delegates were sent to the United States to raise money, and Confederate clubs sprang up wherever Irish people lived in England and Scotland.<sup>108</sup> In June 1847 Meagher had addressed the Confederates of Liverpool among which were included Terence Bellew MacManus (1811-61), whose transatlantic funerary rites would later be such a pivotal moment in the development of Fenianism.<sup>109</sup> In March 1848 Doheny, in company with the Irish-born Chartist leader Feargus O’Connor (1794-1855), spoke on the Irish cause to a meeting of fifteen-to-twenty thousand Chartists at Oldham Edge, near Oldham.<sup>110</sup> In April, a gun shop was opened for the Irish in Liverpool, and in May one opened in Manchester.<sup>111</sup> To intimidate the Liverpool Irish, a military encampment was established in Everton, but the local John Mitchel Club continued to

drill openly.<sup>112</sup> Chartists came to Dublin from Manchester (Leech) and Glasgow (Kydd) to assure the Confederates of cooperation “whenever a blow was struck.”<sup>113</sup> From Dublin, Lalor begged his brother to join him for the rising: “Come—even if father be dying.”<sup>114</sup> When Habeas Corpus was suspended, a supreme council of five was elected to direct the Dublin clubs. Lalor was not chosen and set off for Tipperary to join O’Brien, but he was arrested on July 28 at Ballyhane, kept at Nenagh jail and then sent to Newgate prison, Dublin, where his fragile health broke.<sup>115</sup> In Newgate, Lalor was in daily contact with the many journalists of the Confederation who had been arrested earlier in the month. Duffy was among them, and Lalor tried to convince him of the need to launch another journal to take up again the revolutionary cause: “I acknowledged that Ireland had a *casus belli*; but I denied that she had the power, or even the disposition, to prosecute it in 1849.”<sup>116</sup>

The attempt to induce the gentry to lead a revolt of all the classes had failed. The urban clubs set up by the Confederates were unarmed, only too well aware of the odds against them, and reluctant to initiate the rebellion. Forced into the countryside, the urban rebels did indeed find an underground culture of resistance. On the run after the failure of the rising directed by O’Brien, Doheny found ready assistance in the countryside including a man who “taught me the password of his clan which I was to use on certain contingencies.”<sup>117</sup> Doheny had occasion to be grateful for this secret bond of clan. When D’Arcy McGee returned to Ireland from an aborted mission to secure arms in Scotland, he was landed at Sligo where he found that “there never had been in Sligo or Leitrim any local Confederate or even ‘Repeal’ organisation. The only local societies were secret-Molly Maguires and Ribbonmen.”<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, they promised to muster two thousand men within a week once they were sure that the rising in the South had truly begun: “On this agreement, a trusty messenger was despatched to Tipperary, by way of Roscommon and Westmeath (through which the ‘Molly Maguires’ had established the agency known among Canadians as an ‘underground railway’).”<sup>119</sup> The respect for property among the bourgeois nationalists ensured that they could not but fail to capitalize upon this insurrectionary potential. Upon his release from prison, Lalor gathered about him a group of rebels who were unafraid of conspiracy, including several such as John O’Leary (1830-1907) who were later prominent Fenians. Together with Thomas Clarke Luby (1821-1901), Lalor went to visit Kenyon in August of 1849 in order to test the revolutionary temperature in north Tipperary but, and it would seem unbeknownst to them, Kenyon had already promised his bishop to lead no such rising.<sup>120</sup> On 16 September 1849, they attempted revolution in Tipperary and Waterford. Among others, John O’Mahony (1816-77) returned from exile in Paris to help.<sup>121</sup> In Tipperary the attempt was abandoned for want of support. In Waterford a police station was taken at Cappoquin, but Lalor and Luby were soon arrested and the leaders of the raid on the police station, Joseph Brennan (1828-57) and Savage, fled to the United States. Lalor was soon out of prison, in time to die of bronchitis on 17 December 1849.

By directing their attention to rural revolution, Lalor had put nationalists in touch with the traditions of rural resistance, a development that shaped the tactics of the Fenians thereafter. At the same time, by showing the organic connection between economic and political sovereignty, Lalor exposed the class basis of many nationalist hesitations and reservations, and he laid the groundwork for a dialogue between socialism and nationalism around questions of land reform and colonialism which dominated, for example, the theoretical works of James Connolly. Most important, perhaps, by concentrating on the land question, Lalor invited serious speculation about the social order it was hoped to implement after independence. This utopian ambition is perhaps the most significant of Lalor’s legacies.

### A revolution in theory

Lalor was an avid reader of the *Nation*. From the writings of Thomas Davis, he took an emphasis upon the history of conquest and, from John O'Donovan's historical studies, he retained an image of a communal, democratic, pre-conquest island. Like Davis, he saw the fertility of the land as guarantor of the viability of a self-governing nation. Like Davis, he saw the social structure of the country by light of the conquest.<sup>122</sup> For Lalor, though, the crucial question was not the evocation of a pluralist people but the construction of a just economic order out of the exploitative despoliation of occupation by foreign powers. Lalor was not in thrall to a political compact with landlords and did not see the rights of property as absolute. The propertied basis of class relations was basic to his understanding of the social structure of rural Ireland in a way that was not true of Davis. In the abstract, he held that "a secure and independent agricultural peasantry" was the essential and only firm "foundation" for a nation.<sup>123</sup> For any country, food was the "first want" and even manufacturing relied upon "the support of a numerous and efficient agricultural yeomanry."<sup>124</sup> From observation, Lalor concluded that the lot of the small farmer in Ireland was much better than that of the wage laborer.<sup>125</sup> In his opinion, a serious, but unnoticed, consequence of the Famine was the derangement of rural class relations with small tenant farmers being reduced to wage labor.<sup>126</sup> The poor law acted in the same direction. The English poor law from 1834 aimed at confining aid to the wholly destitute, seeking thereby to reduce the dependence of the able-bodied upon the dole of out-relief. These principles were introduced progressively into the Irish system. During the Famine, farmers were refused aid as long as they had any grain to sell. This meant that they could not retain seed to sow for next year's crop: "This was to declare in favor of pauperism, and to vote for another famine. [...] To me it seems it would have been safer to incur the risk of pauperizing *their feelings* than the certainty of pauperizing *their means*; and better even to take away *the will* to be independent than to take away *the power*."<sup>127</sup> His understanding of the rural class structure made Lalor even more suspicious than Davis of a version of Repeal that would merely empower the Irish landlords since this would be to set a new group of Irish tyrants in place of their English predecessors.<sup>128</sup> True nationalism implied a concern for the common good. The good faith of the Irish gentry was subject to one simple test. If the landlords sided with English oppression against peasant resistance they would be guilty of treason.<sup>129</sup> By supporting the Coercion Act in December 1847 the gentry announced itself an enemy of the people. In clearing their estates, the landlords were trying to abolish Ireland, to eliminate the Irish people. Lalor hoped that the people would not stand for it.<sup>130</sup>

Lalor brought together two strands in his treatment of the land question. The first was the injustice of the conquest. The second was a defense of a sort of moral economy, which had been undercut by the conquest and was further menaced by the political economy of capitalism. The anti-modern moral critique of capitalism was common to Lalor, to Davis and to groups such as the Ribbonmen: "The secret societies practiced a kind of preservative violence. Their goal was less revolution than the restoration of a customary moral economy which the forces of capitalist modernization were gravely jeopardizing."<sup>131</sup> Lalor's synthesis of these historical and economic themes was achieved through an account of the social contract as legitimizing resistance and with a sketch of the ethical basis of a new dispensation. The prevailing property relations in rural Ireland were subject to the historical criticism that they were unjust and to the economic criticism that they failed to keep alive the Irish people. In Ireland, property relations could not be justified on the grounds of first occupancy because the land had been stolen from the Irish people by the occupying British forces.<sup>132</sup> Nor could landowners appeal to the argument that the productivity of the soil was their own creation. Lalor argued that the soil bore fruit by god's leave alone. As a gift from god, earth's bounty was entrusted to humanity as a whole and no individual could use

or own it except by the consent of all other men.<sup>133</sup> Private property in land, then, was a collective decision taken for the greater good. Land was distributed among individual owners because this had been found to be the most effective way of maximizing the social good of food production. The division of lands should result in an economy of small peasant farmers: "When it is made by agreement there will be equality of distribution, which equality of distribution will remain permanent within certain limits. For under natural laws, landed property has rather a tendency to divide than to accumulate."<sup>134</sup> In the original position, then, individuals would agree to private property because this made farming efficient but they would hardly agree to any gross inequality in the distribution of land. In contrast, the property arrangements imposed by the British involved just such a gross inequality and shored up this inequality by making partible inheritance illegal. The social contract maintained by force of British occupation was unjust. It was also a failure.

Lalor found plenty that was rotten in the state of Ireland. The people were starving. The farmers were being thrown off the land. Landlords exported grain. Land was being given over to cattle while people were being given over to the high seas or the graveyard. The British government aided and abetted this immiseration. By direct act of god or indirect act of nature, Irish society stood condemned:

When society fails to perform its duty and fulfil its office of providing for its people; it must take another and more effective form, or it must cease to exist. When its members begin to die out under destitution—when they begin to perish in thousands under famine and the effects of famine—when they begin to desert and fly from the land in hundreds of thousands under the force and fear of deadly famine—then it is time to see it is God's will that society should stand dissolved, and assume another shape and action; and he works his will by human hands and natural agencies. This case has arisen even now in Ireland, and the effect has already followed in part. Society stands dissolved.<sup>135</sup>

The abject failure of the social order meant, in Lalor's view, that "a clear original right returns and reverts to the people—the right of establishing and entering into a new social arrangement."<sup>136</sup> The granting of property rights, then, is a conditional matter subject to the test of being found to be in the public interest: "I hold and maintain that the entire soil of a country belongs of right to the people of that country, and is the rightful property not of any one class, but of the nation at large, in full effective possession, to let to whom they will on whatever tenures, rents, services, and conditions they will."<sup>137</sup> The people of Ireland had a permanent right to review such matters as the tenure of their lands: "I rest it on no temporary and passing conditions but on principles that are permanent and imperishable, and universal; available to all times and to all countries, as well as to our own."<sup>138</sup> The British occupation denied this right to the Irish, for those who control the land end up making the laws:

A people whose lands and lives are thus in the keeping and custody of others, instead of in their own, are not in a position of common safety. The Irish famine of '46 is example and proof. The corn crops were sufficient to feed the island. But the landlords *would* have their rents in spite of the famine, and in defiance of those who raised it. They took the whole harvest and left hunger to those who raised it. Had the people of Ireland been the landlords of Ireland, not a single human creature would have died of hunger, nor the failure of the potato been considered of any consequence.<sup>139</sup>

According to Lalor, the Irish people were subject to "slavery, with all its horrors, and with none of its physical comforts and security."<sup>140</sup> It is for this reason that he urged nationalists to move beyond the political goal of Repeal to the economic goal of "full and absolute independence," meaning "[t]he soil of Ireland for the people of Ireland."<sup>141</sup> The Irish had the right to defend their lives: "The present salvation and future security of this country require that the English government should at once be abolished, and the English garrison of landlords instantly expelled. Necessity demands it—the great necessity of self-defense. Self-defense—self-protection—it is the first law of nature, the first duty of man."<sup>142</sup> The new social contract must meet the test of sustaining life. Tenants should assert immediately their claim "to a full and sufficient subsistence out of the crops they have raised, and to a sufficiency of seed for next year's crops," before they made any payment of rent.<sup>143</sup> If rent came before food or seed, it starved the people this year or next, and as such was unjust.

Lalor's revolutionary strategy sprang from the same considerations. In the face of the famine, "I selected as the *mode* of reconquest, to refuse payment of rent and resist process of ejection."<sup>144</sup> To achieve this the farmers needed to be organized in a sort of militia, an armed and disciplined peasant army that Lalor saw as the basis for open rebellion. Lalor criticized Mitchel's preference for a spontaneous urban insurrection, dismissing the proposed putsch: "I want a prepared, organized and resistless revolution. *You* only have an unprepared, disorderly and vile jacquerie."<sup>145</sup> Lalor wanted to see developed a parallel set of institutions in Ireland through which the people would learn the discipline of self-government.<sup>146</sup> A "moral insurrection" in the countryside, based on resisting evictions, would draw the British army out of urban barracks into a diffuse rural war in which they would stand clear as the aggressors.<sup>147</sup> The British army could be hindered in its aggression through the destruction of roads, bridges and railway lines.<sup>148</sup> These forms of passive resistance would postpone but might not avoid the necessity for armed conflict but the British would be forced to initiate the violence and the Irish could appeal to the claims of justice implicit in the defense of life and land.

Lalor saw this as the start of a European movement as significant as that which rippled out from the French Revolution of 1789: "The right of the people to make the laws—this produced the first modern earthquake, whose latent shocks, even now, are heaving in the heart of the world. The right of the people to own the land—this will produce the next."<sup>149</sup> It was not enough that nationalists such as those in the Confederation should seek an alliance with landlords in pursuit of the breaking of the Union: "They wanted an alliance with the landowners. They chose to consider them as Irishmen, and imagined they could induce them to hoist the green flag. They wished to preserve an Aristocracy. They desired not a *democratic* but a merely *national* revolution."<sup>150</sup> The goal for the Irish should be "[n]ot to repeal the Union, then, but to repeal the Conquest."<sup>151</sup> It was for these reasons that Lalor spoke of the political claims of Repeal as "a petty parish question" whereas the economic demands of land reform might be asserted by the Irish on behalf of all the conquered peoples of the world. "[H]eading all the nations," Ireland would be "the lodestar of history."<sup>152</sup> Connolly noted the cosmopolitan dimension of this appeal: "Lalor [...] advocated his principles as part of the creed of the democracy of the world, and not merely as applicable only to the incidents of the struggle of Ireland against England."<sup>153</sup> Only this sort of universal and expansive goal could animate an effective revolution. Lalor asserted that "a petty enterprise seldom succeeds."<sup>154</sup> On this basis, the Irish might pursue a principled and not merely a tactical alliance with the Chartists. Indeed, Lalor argued that the *Irish Felon* should appoint to its editorial board at least one of the English Chartists who were sympathetic to the Irish cause.<sup>155</sup>

Lalor had travelled quite a distance from the religious inflection of the tithe war and the social economy of Conner's land reform. The crucial innovation was to insist on the interdependence of landlordism and colonialism. His analysis of the injustice of Irish property



relations came back to the original theft of the land from the people of Ireland and its gifting instead to an alien class, a class which thereafter could extort rents from Irish people even at the peril of Irish lives. In face of the Famine, any social contract was dissolved, having failed the test of sustaining life. Independence, then, was needed in order to set aright the Irish social contract. This new social order required that control over Irish affairs be retained within the island of Ireland and anticolonial nationalism is made prospective and not merely retrospective. This was the meaning of Lalor's appeal to Duffy that the Confederation adopt a broad understanding of nationality: "full and absolute independence."<sup>156</sup>

Yes! Ireland SHALL be free,  
From the centre to the sea;  
Then hurra for Liberty!  
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*.<sup>157</sup>

## NOTES

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- 9 Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" [1852], trans. Saul K. Padover, in David Fernbach (ed.), *Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile* (London: Penguin, 1973), 143-249, 143.
- 10 Gerry Kearns, "Time and Some Citizenship: Nationalism and Thomas Davis," *Bullán: An Irish Studies Journal* 5 (2001): 23-54.
- 11 L. Perry Curtis, "[Moral and Physical Force](#): The Language of Violence in Irish Nationalism," *Journal of British Studies* 27, no. 2 (1988): 150-189.
- 12 "Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland," *Freeman's Journal* (29 December 1840): 2-4, 3.
- 13 Charles Gavan Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History, 1845-49* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, 1883), 192.
- 14 Loc. cit.
- 15 "Conciliation Hall," *Freeman's Journal* (14 July 1846): 2-3, 3.
- 16 John Savage (1828-88) quoted in, C. O'Shannon, "James Fintan Lalor," in Michael J. MacManus (ed.), *Thomas Davis and Young Ireland* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1945): 68-70, 69.
- 17 James O'Connor, "James Stephens, the Head Centre: Personal Recollections," *Southern Star* (6 April 1901), 2.

- 18 Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, Page, 1920 [1872]).
- 19 J.J., “James Fintan Lalor,” *Skibbereen Eagle* (13 October 1900), 6.
- 20 Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, or The Story of the Land League Revolution* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1904), 58.
- 21 David N. Buckley, *James Fintan Lalor: Radical* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1990), 91.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 24 John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel* (New York: Chase D. Young, 1929), 17.
- 25 Pádraig Pearse, “Ghosts” [1915], in *idem* (ed.) *Collected Works of Pádraic H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin: Phoenix Publishing, 1924), 219-250, 239.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 246.
- 27 James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1914 [1910]), 185-6.
- 28 Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 188.
- 29 John Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 149.
- 30 British Parliamentary Papers [BPP] 1831-2 (663) xxii, 181, *Second Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the Collection and Payment of Tithes in Ireland*, 62.
- 31 “Tithes! Tithes! Tithes!” *Freeman’s Journal* (12 September 1836): 1.
- 32 Buckley, *Lalor*, 14.
- 33 Quoted in Lilian Fogarty, *James Fintan Lalor: Patriot and Political Essayist (1807-1849)* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1919), xviii. Fogarty suggested that Charles Gavan Duffy, as editor of the *Nation*, was reporting on Patrick Lalor’s disenchantment with Daniel O’Connell, but I think she strained too hard in assimilating the father’s to the views of the son, particularly given the many evidences of father trying to discipline son for hostility to O’Connell and for proclivity towards insurrection.
- 34 BPP 1831-2 (663), 64.
- 35 BPP 1831-2 (508), xxi, 245, *Second Report from the Select Committee on Tithes in Ireland*: 376
- 36 BPP 1831-2 (271), xxii, 1, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee of the House Lords Appointed to Inquire into the Collection and Payment of Tithes in Ireland*: 29.
- 37 BPP 1831-2 (663), 68.
- 38 “The Repeal Movement in the Queen’s County,” *Freeman’s Journal* (17 February 1843): 3.
- 39 BPP 1845 [657], xxi, 1, *Evidence taken before Her Majesty’s Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland. Part III*: 329.
- 40 BPP 1835 (547), viii, 1, *Select Committee on Preventing Bribery, Corruption and Intimidation at Elections*: 285.
- 41 *Loc. cit.*
- 42 *Ibid.*, 286-7.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 533.
- 44 BPP 1845 [657], 334.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 607.
- 46 *Loc. cit.*
- 47 *Loc. cit.*
- 48 Noneen Clare [pseud.], “Tenakill: James Fintan Lalor’s Home,” *Kilkenny People* (21 November 1936): 8. This was probably someone known to the family since this is the earliest known publication of quotations from letters of James Fintan Lalor to his family.

- 49 Loc. cit.
- 50 Thomas P. O'Neill, *James Fintan Lalor* [1962], trans. John T. Goulding (Dublin: Golden Publications, 2003), 27.
- 51 Ibid., 30.
- 52 William Conner, *The True Political Economy of Ireland: Or, Rack-Rent the One Great Cause of All her Evils, with its Remedy* (Dublin: Wakeman, 1835), iii.
- 53 George O'Brien, "William Conner," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 46 (1923): 279-289.
- 54 O'Neill, "The Irish Land Question, 1830-50," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 44:175 (1955): 325-336.
- 55 O'Neill, *Lalor*,
- 56 Patrick Maume, "William Conner," in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); <http://dib.cambridge.org>.
- 57 O'Neill, *Lalor*: 17.
- 58 Ibid., 39.
- 59 Ibid., 38.
- 60 Ibid., 39.
- 61 These data on crimes are from monthly returns made by the Irish constabulary: BPP 1843 [460] li, 49, *A Return of Outrages Reported by the Constabulary in Ireland During the Years 1837, 1838, 1839, 1840, and 1841; a Like Return of Outrages During Each Month of the Year 1842; and for the Months of January, February, and March, 1843*: 9-20; BPP 1843 (276) li, 169, *Outrages (Ireland). A Return of Outrages Reported to the Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle, During the Month of April 1843*: 3-4; BPP 1843 (352) li, 173, *Outrages (Ireland). A Return of Outrages in Ireland Specially reported to the Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle, During the Month of May 1843*: 2-3; BPP 1843 (419) li, 177, *Outrages (Ireland). A Return of Outrages in Ireland Specially Reported to the Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle, During the Month of June 1843*: 3-4.
- 62 BPP 1843 [460], 3-4; BPP 1846 (217), xxv, 451, *Outrages (Ireland). A return of outrages Specially Reported to the Constabulary Office in Ireland, During the ear 1842, 1843, 1844 and 1845. Abstract Return of Total Number of Persons in Ireland Appearing by the Returns of the Clerks of the Crown and Clerks of the Peace of the Several Counties, &c. to Have Been Committed for Trial, or Discharged, &c. in the Years 1844 and 1845*: 1.
- 63 Tom Garvin, "Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland," *Past and Present* 96 (1982): 133-155.
- 64 O'Neill, *Lalor*: 36-7.
- 65 Ibid., 39.
- 66 Buckley, *Lalor*: 63.
- 67 O'Neill, *Lalor*: 47.
- 68 National Library of Ireland [NLI] MS 340/59, "To the Landowners of Ireland," 10 January 1844: f. 46.
- 69 O'Neill, *Lalor*, 150.
- 70 William J. Smyth, "The Longue Durée—Imperial Britain and Colonial Ireland," in John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy (eds) *The Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 46-63, 49
- 71 James S. Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Phoenix Mill, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2001).
- 72 Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- 73 Fogarty, *Father John Kenyon: A Patriot Priest of Forty-Eight* (Dublin: Whelan, 1921), 57.
- 74 Ibid., 26.

- 75 Ibid., 54.
- 76 Ibid., 100.
- 77 Ibid., 88.
- 78 Lalor, "To Charles Gavan Duffy, Editor of the 'Nation'" [11 January 1847] in O'Neill, *Lalor*: 133-6, 134.
- 79 Loc. cit.
- 80 Ibid., 135.
- 81 Quoted in Kevin B. Nowlan, "The Political Background," in Robert Dudley Edwards and Thomas Desmond Williams (eds), *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish history, 1845-52* (Dublin: Lilliput Press 1994 [1956]), 129-206, 171.
- 82 Fogarty, "Biographical Note," in *Idem.*, *Lalor*: ix-xxix, xxiii. In the eighteenth-century folksong, "Shan Van Vocht," the old woman who is the personification of Ireland asks if Ireland will be free when the French come to support a nationalist uprising. The reply can be heard echoing in Lalor's phrasing: "Yes! Ireland SHALL be free, | From the centre to the sea; | Then hurra for Liberty! Says the *Shan Van Vocht*"; "Shan Van Vocht," trans. Thomas Kinsella, in Kinsella (ed.) *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 256-7, ll 53-6.
- 83 Kearns, "'[Educate that Holy Hatred](#)': Place, Trauma and Identity in the Irish Nationalism of John Mitchel," *Political Geography* 20, no. 7 (2001): 885-911.
- 84 Letter of 22 April 1847, quoted in: William Dillon, *The Life of John Mitchel, Vol. I* (London: K. Paul, Trench, 1888), 157.
- 85 Ibid., 184.
- 86 Quoted in Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 168.
- 87 Ibid., 169.
- 88 Letter of 21 June 1847, quoted in Steve Knowlton, "The Enigma of Charles Gavan Duffy: Looking for Clues in Australia," *Éire-Ireland* 31 (1996): 189-208, 200.
- 89 Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 178.
- 90 Fogarty, "Biographical Note," xxix.
- 91 Nowlan, "Political Background," 183.
- 92 Quoted in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 120.
- 93 On Mitchel's motion that the Confederation should abandon constitutionalism, there were 188 ayes and 317 noes: Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 186.
- 94 Mitchel, "Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)" [1850], in *Idem.*, *The Crusade of the Period; and Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (New York: Lynch, Cole and Meehan, 1873), 96-324, 259.
- 95 Duffy claimed that Lalor rejected the position because he found the salary derisory: Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 186.
- 96 Ibid., 190.
- 97 Ibid., 201.
- 98 Nowlan, "Political Background," 191. The working man selected was a silk-weaver named Edward Holywood: Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*: 201; Arthur Griffith, "Contemporaries Mentioned in 'The Felon's Track,'" in Michael Doheny, *The Felon's Track, or the History of the Attempted Outbreak in Ireland, Embracing the Leading Events in the Irish Struggle from the Year 1843 to the Close of 1848* (Dublin: Gill, 1914 [1849]), 302-316, 307.
- 99 Nowlan, "Political Background," 189. In the event, the one thing the young French republic wanted to avoid was a confrontation with Britain. Lamartine, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, was lobbied by the British before the Irish delegation arrived and the Irish were told that France would not interfere in Britain's internal affairs.

- 100 John Mitchel, *The History of Ireland from the Treaty of Limerick to the Present Time: Being a Continuation of the History of the Abbé MacGeoghegan, Vol. II* (Glasgow: Cameron Ferguson, 1899 [1867]), 227, 231.
- 101 *United Irishman*, 4 March 1848, quoted in John Newsinger, "John Mitchel and Irish Nationalism," *Literature and History* 6 (1980), 182-200, 189.
- 102 Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 213.
- 103 Loc. cit.
- 104 John G. Hodges, *Report of the Trial of John Mitchel for Felony, Before the Right Honourable Baron Lefroy, and the Right Hon. Justice Moore, at Commission Court, Dublin, May, 1848* (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1848), 98.
- 105 Doheny, *Felon's Track*, 138.
- 106 John Martin, quoted in Mitchel, "Last Conquest," 296.
- 107 Duffy, *Four Years*, 218.
- 108 Ultimately £10,000 was raised in the North America but it arrived too late to be used for the insurrection for which it was intended. The money was returned: *Ibid.*, 249.
- 109 John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain from the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), 134.
- 110 *Ibid.*, 138.
- 111 *Ibid.*, 139.
- 112 *Ibid.*, 141-2.
- 113 Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 219.
- 114 Letter of 17 July 1848 to Richard Lalor, quoted in Fogarty, *Lalor*: 119. Richard joined the Confederation: Fogarty, "Biographical note," xxx.
- 115 Fogarty, "Biographical Note," xxxiii-xxxv; Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*: 229, 235; Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-9* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), 417.
- 116 Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 275.
- 117 Doheny, *Felon's Track*, 256.
- 118 "Thomas Darcy McGee's narrative of 1848" [1850] in *Ibid.*, 289-97, 294. McGee had been spotted in Edinburgh, which explained his hasty return to Ireland via Whitehaven.
- 119 Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History*, 244.
- 120 Fogarty, *Kenyon*, 119-20.
- 121 John Rutherford, *The Secret History of the Fenian Conspiracy; Its Origin, Objects, and Ramifications, Volume I* (London: C.K. Paul, 1877), 48. O'Mahony repaired later to Paris and went on to found the Fenian movement in the United States. Luby and Savage were also to become leading Fenians.
- 122 Kearns, "Time and Some Citizenship."
- 123 Lalor, "A New Nation" [1847], in Fogarty, *Lalor*: 7-25, 21.
- 124 *Ibid.*, 22-3.
- 125 Lalor, "Tenant's Right and Landlord Law" [1847], in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 26-37, 28.
- 126 Lalor, "A New Nation," 9.
- 127 Lalor, "Tenant's Right," 35. This article was published in May 1847. Throughout the year, the British parliament debated reforms to the Irish poor law with the *London Times* supporting from March onwards, the proposal of the Dublin M.P., William Gregory (1817-92), that no farmer with more than a quarter acre of land should be entitled to relief. This was included in the Act passed that November and the proletarianising of the tenant farmers proceeded apace: O'Neill, "The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845-52," in Edwards and Williams, *Great Famine*, 207-259, 253.
- 128 Lalor, "A New Nation," 15.

- 129 Ibid., 17.
- 130 Ibid., 24-5.
- 131 Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 84.
- 132 Lalor, "The Faith of a Felon" [1848], in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 92-105, 99.
- 133 Ibid., 100.
- 134 Ibid., 101.
- 135 Lalor, "A New Nation," 10.
- 136 Quoted in Nowlan, "Political Background," 172.
- 137 Lalor, "Letter to the *Irish Felon*" [1848], in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 52-66, 61.
- 138 Lalor, "Faith," 98.
- 139 Lalor, "Letter to *Felon*," 62.
- 140 Loc. cit.
- 141 Ibid., 57.
- 142 Lalor, "The First Step—the Felon Club" [1848], in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 84-8, 85.
- 143 Lalor, "Tenant Right Meeting in Tipperary" [1847], in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 47-51, 48.
- 144 Lalor, "Faith," 93.
- 145 Quoted in Priscilla Metscher, *Republicanism and Socialism in Ireland: A Study in the Relationship of Politics and Ideology from the United Irishmen to James Connolly* (Frankfurt-am-Main: P. Lang, 1986), 99.
- 146 "To the Confederate and Repeal Clubs in Ireland" [1848], in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 67-83, 75. Davis had been sympathetic to this intention and had hoped that the local Repeal clubs could be used for the purpose. O'Connell's wish to keep distance from the insurrectionary language of Young Ireland hindered this development but the idea of a sort of unofficial parliament of three hundred remained a fond hope of many.
- 147 Ibid., 76.
- 148 Lalor, "Faith," 96.
- 149 Quoted in Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 188.
- 150 Lalor, "Faith," 94.
- 151 Lalor, "Letter to *Felon*," 59.
- 152 Lalor, "Letter to Duffy," 3.
- 153 Connolly, Loc. cit.
- 154 Lalor, "Letter to *Felon*," 59.
- 155 Lalor, "What must be done?" [1848], in Fogarty, *Lalor*, 89-92: 91.
- 156 Lalor, "Letter to *Felon*," 57.
- 157 "Shan Van Vocht," II, 53-6.