

developed printing in the 11th century, years before Europe, and its iron production in the 11th century was double that of England's in 1788.

Socialism or barbarism

However, it is the final section dealing with the 20th century, the 'century of hope and horror', which is the climax of the book. In ten chapters Harman takes us through the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the failure of revolution in Europe, the revolt of the colonies, the great slump, Stalinism, fascism, the Second World War, the Cold War, the collapse of Communism, and much else besides, right up to the crisis facing humanity today. In the conclusion he looks forward to the possible outcomes of that crisis. At this point, fittingly, the writing reaches its greatest intensity and fluency. Harman looks back at the rise and fall of civilisation over the whole 5,000 years of class society, and especially the mounting devastation of the terrible dashes of this century, and draws on this experience to inform his analysis of the present and the future. Recording the ever-increasing polarisation between the world's rich and the world's poor, the development of the underlying economic crisis of capitalism, the growing threat to the survival of the planet as a habitable environment, and the escalating scale and power of the weapons of destruction, he argues that humanity really does face the choice of overthrowing capitalism and advancing to socialism or falling back into barbarism in the full scientific sense of the word, ie

the destruction of civilisation. These passages make chilling reading, but Harman does not leave matters there. He shows that there exists a social force with both a vital interest in and the capacity to resolve the crisis in a positive direction. He shows that this class is now larger and stronger than ever before in history. Whether or not it is able to realise its full potential depends on its ability to develop within its own ranks the consciousness, organisation and leadership to secure victory in the great struggles between capitalist and labour which can only intensify in the coming century. The book thus ends by consciously positioning itself as a small factor in the overall battle whose history it records and analyses: the battle for the self emancipation of the working class and the liberation of humanity.

With a book of this scale and range it was inevitable that I, like any reader, sometimes wished for a shift of emphasis, for more on this and that, especially sometimes on cultural or philosophical matters, and occasionally I cavilled at the odd comment or formulation, but frankly these points pale into insignificance in the face of the extraordinary total achievement. A People's History of the World will win people to socialism, strengthen the convictions of the already converted and enhance the ideological armoury of everyone who reads it. It will serve as an indispensable reference point for years to come."

Struggle in the countryside

Breandán Mac Suibhne
The End of Outrage Post-Famine Adjustment in Rural Ireland

Review by Tiarnán Ó Muilleoir

Most of my teenage summers at some point included a three-week stint at a Gaeltacht college in the Gweedore parish of northwest Donegal. At the time – especially being a city-slicker from the 'big smoke' of Belfast – its landscape of sheep and steep hills, bogs and desolate beaches, seemed like the ultimate picture-postcard vision of uneventful Irish rural life, or 'rural idiocy' as Marx characterised it less charitably.

In reading Breandán Mac Suibhne's *End of Outrage: Post-Famine Adjustment in Rural Ireland* I came to realise that in fact this idyllic landscape was shaped by some of the most intractable class struggles of the post-famine era, particularly when local landlords sought to clear their smaller tenants from the land in order to replace them on the hillsides with the more profitable sheep flocks of Scottish and English graziers.

The Gweedore smallholders retaliated with ferocious resistance, stealing and destroying the sheep and violently rejecting any attempts to clear them from the land. At one point in the conflict, in the

summer of 1857, the bishop of the diocese arrived to harangue his parishioners, evoking the omnipotent imperial reach of the British state in order to convince them of the futility of their resistance:

'England has sent out an army to the Crimea, and she has conquered the Russians; she has sent an army to China, and she has conquered the Chinese; and do you mean to tell me, that you, a small corner of a parish in the County of Donegal, mean to stand up and say you will oppose the law of England?'

It is the connecting of these dots – of the processes that shaped the Irish countryside on a local level into its stereotypical pattern of individual plots, small homes, and enclosed fields – to capital accumulation and state formation on an imperial, trans-Atlantic, and global scale, that is the standout achievement of this excellent book. *Outrage* takes as its focal point the remote village of Beagh, situated further south along the West Donegal coast, near the town of Ardara in the Glenties area of the county. Its central narrative tells the tale, passed down through oral seanchas, of a local schoolmaster named Patrick McGlynn who betrayed his comrades in the Molly Maguires to the authorities in the hard post-famine years of the 1850s.

The 'Mollies' as they were known to contemporaries were one of several agrarian secret societies in operation across Ireland in this period, and utilised various aspects of masonry, confessional

superstition, and Jacobin-style rhetoric and violence to terrorise both landlords and larger tenants that refused to abide by the normative 'moral economy' of the smallholding tenantry of the period. One example of an outrage that Mac Suibhne gives is of a "big farmer" who rented disputed land near the town of Ballyshannon with the goal of evicting his sub-tenant, and who – after several threatening letters – had his harvested wheat and oats that were bound for market destroyed. Another, more serious incident, involved a home invasion by the Mollies of a farmer, the destruction of his milk, and a ferocious beating that left the man on the verge of death.

McGlynn 'turning informer' was provoked by the threat of a similar outrage to be carried out by the Mollies against a 'strong farmer' in Beagh, James Gallagher, accused of ill-treatment of his neighbours, sub-tenants and even his own elderly father. This betrayal led to the arrest of dozens of alleged Molly Maguire members in West Donegal in 1856 and a much-publicised trial of the 'Ardara Mollies' the following year.

McGlynn's story (and his eventual fate, half the world away as a colonial settler in Australia) offers a profound metaphor for the rapidly shifting terrain of social, cultural, and political relations in post-famine Ireland. This era was one of widespread turbulence and social unrest as the demise of the cottier class through starvation and emigration meant that large tracts of land lay suddenly unoccupied and could be more profitably occupied by livestock than poor

smallholders, leading to growing tensions over land use.

Mac Suibhne argues that the roots of these tensions are to be located prior to the Famine however, in the 'squaring' of 1838-41, a process whereby the traditional rundale system of common land-holding was replaced with individually-rented plots of land. It was at this point that the inhabitants of Beagh – and other localities across West Donegal and similar isolated regions – were drawn into a more individualistic, commercialised, system of property relations. It is this original research and case study of the pre and post-famine transformation of one rural community over the course of the nineteenth century that offers the most interesting material for Irish Marxists. Something like the process of "squaring" which Mac Suibhne outlines as occurring in Beagh must have transpired across most of Ireland in the hundred years before the Famine, as an emerging English domestic market for corn and meat led to the 'rationalisation' of estates by 'improving' landlords and their appointed agents.

The subsequent intensified financial and productive pressures on "strong" tenants, subletting tenants (cottiers), and struggling smallholders eking out a living on a couple of acres of poor land, played a central role in the 'Malthusian' disaster of the Famine. The winners and losers of this era formed the eventual class factions that dominated the politics of the Irish countryside even into the 20th century, through the IRA split and eventual Blueshirt – Fianna

Fail conflict, as Mac Suibhne describes occurred in Beagh, with his grandfather being one of the protagonists.

The chapters on post-famine adjustment in particular, are excellent ‘thick’ social history, detailing how the waves of emigrants that left Donegal would go on to participate in further bloody class struggle across the Atlantic, as the leaders of a multinational working class resistance to the exactions of mine bosses in the anthracite seam regions of Pennsylvania. Gradually, these pioneers of Irish-America and the rebellious Mollies would be incorporated into the nascent US party-political system of the Gilded Age, and from multi-ethnic class radicalism they would venture into institutionalisation in the Democratic electoral machine and confessional separatism in the form of the Hibernians. Mac Suibhne argues that the Mollies back in West Donegal experienced something similar, as a ‘split’ between the more and less conservative wings of the movement, increased repression, and growing electoral reform all led to gradual institutionalisation within the broader movement of parliamentary Nationalism. It’s in this period (1855-1900), which the author dubs the ‘age of infidelity’, that adjustment to the post-famine status quo necessitated the decline of the Irish language, the end of a primitive-pagan Catholicism, and the loss of a meaningful historical memory that had sustained the practice of the ‘outrage’ and the communal solidarity it drew its moral basis from.

One area of critique is a question that I felt Mac Suibhne could have explored more thoroughly: whether or not this “age of infidelity” – or some other earlier stage (the squaring, or the traumas of the famine) – witnessed a transition to capitalism in Beagh, and similar localities.

That is to say, were post-famine agrarian societies such as the Mollies a product of capitalist petty producers seeking to restrain the accumulatory drives of larger capitalist producers and commercial landlords? Or were they pre or non-capitalist producers dependent on their subsistence-oriented plots, seeking to restrain the full flowering of a free market in land and produce (and labour by implication)? Mac Suibhne doesn’t explicitly offer a theorisation of the conflict in these terms.

However, the author himself notes in the final chapters how ‘backwards’ this region of Donegal remained right into the second half of the 20th century, which is symptomatic of the chronic problems of low productivity and efficiency in Irish agriculture that dogged subsequent independent 26-country governments that sought to reform the economy of the small-holding West. And what is true of West Donegal is equally true of the other densely-populated smallholding regions: much of Connacht, Kerry, parts of Cork, and tillage areas in the southeast. It seems to me that if Mac Suibhne is correct, that the Mollies declined in the second half of the nineteenth century (or perhaps more accurately: were eventually incorporated

into local and national networks of power) that this was less a ‘betrayal’ of their stated goals than premised on the fulfilment of much of the Mollies original redistributive agrarian programme via the vehicle of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary Nationalist politics in the form of the IPP and the Land League – in the guise of ‘tenant right’ (1870), tenant purchase (1881-1903), and formal independence (1920s).

If this thesis were correct then we could say that the smallholders of Ardara – and the Gweedore sheep rustlers – in spite of all the deprivations they undoubtedly faced, successfully resisted the fate of their counterparts across most of the rest of Europe in this period. Rather than being subsumed to what the American Marxist historian Robert Brenner has called “market dependence” – the necessity to “sell to survive”, to market the entirety of one’s produce, and compete through investment in the most modern productive techniques – the Irish smallholder stalled, stemmed, and eventually negated the process of deepening capitalisation of land in the post-famine period through an entire prolonged phase of class struggle that terminates with the Land Acts.

What was required in order to impose capitalist productive relations in these regions was the real threat or – more accurately – successful practice of large-scale eviction and agglomeration of inefficient holdings. In its absence, processes such as ‘squaring’ could only institutionalise a transition from a system of non-capitalist

communal land possession to a system of individualised non-capitalist petty holdings. This era might well have witnessed the emergence of a full-blown agrarian capitalism along the lines of the Irish midlands or the English model – but it would have required an active collusion between the larger tenants and landlords to make it so (as occurred in both of the former regions) – to throw the smallholders off the land and agglomerate their petty holdings into substantial holdings of at least 100 acres upon which up-to-date capitalist agricultural techniques could have been implemented. Something like this process did in fact occur in a small backwards agrarian country in Europe, with free trade with Britain, in the 18th and 19th centuries: in Denmark. There, a peasant-based economy at the tail end of the 1700s eventually rationalised into one based on capitalist (cooperative) farms that was able to outcompete rivals such as Ireland – which declined in competitiveness and productivity with the rise of ‘peasant proprietorship’ from the first Land Act in 1870 onwards – over the critical period 1860-1900. Denmark became the breakfast foods supplier of industrial England, generating a surplus population and indigenous capital – and the social relation of market dependence between the two – that set the grounds for industrialisation and – eventually – a ‘redistributive’ Scandinavian model of capitalism. Another variable to consider might be the non-development of factory production of clothing in West Donegal, which had been

a centre of a domestic knitting industry throughout the 18th and early 19th century, as described by Mac Suibhne. The putting-out system that developed here did not terminate in the “satanic mill” as occurred in the shirt-making industry of Derry or the linen mills of Belfast. I would argue again that this was precisely because the smallholders in much of Ulster outside the most intensely cleared-and-planted six counties of the northeast retained non-market determined, or customary access to their land, regulated by the pike and blunderbuss – not competitive market rents successfully enforced ‘in the last instance’ by the physical force of the bailiff and state. The 20th century ‘underdevelopment’ detailed by Mac Suibhne can then perhaps be best understood in this account as as the enduring legacy of the Mollies: the western Irish smallholder’s continued (partial) possession of their means of production and subsistence, and their on-going refusal to be divorced from them; instead orienting their production towards self-sufficiency in the first instance. This remains compatible with Mac Suibhne’s overall thesis that the legacy of the “squaring” and the Famine was the immensely destructive decline of Gaelic-Irish culture, sub-division and rundale, as well as a growing individualism that frayed the knots of solidarity in communities like Ardara. Of course, Mac Suibhne didn’t aim to produce a theoretical text on the genesis or non-genesis of agrarian capitalism in Ireland, but rather a meticulous micro-history of

the changes wrought in one locale by the man-made traumas of the nineteenth century. In this, through the fluid presentation of a vast array of economic and ethnographic detail – as well as his virtuosic command of the relevant primary and secondary sources – he is wildly successful. His study is one that greatly enriches Irish historiography of the 19th century, and offers a compelling insight into the transformation of rural communities in the contested transition to modernity in Ireland. It is a work of humane and politically committed – yet rigorous and critical – scholarship, which correctly situates the colonial context of its subject matter, without tending to the pitfalls of traditional nationalist mythography. Anyone seeking to understand the making – or non-making – of the Irish working class (at home and abroad) could do worse than begin here.