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# St John Ervine and the Fabian Society: Capital, Empire and Irish Home Rule

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*History Workshop Journal*, Volume 72, Issue 1, 1 October 2011, Pages 52–73,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbr008>

**Published:** 25 August 2011

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## Abstract

Debates over the role of empire in the context of the Boer War, the rebellion against the Liberal Party due to Gladstone's exclusive focus on the Irish Question, and the inherent London-centrism of the Society resulted in Fabian apathy towards Irish Home Rule, despite the fact that one of the

Society's most prominent founders, G. B. Shaw, was 'an inveterate ... Home Ruler'. Playwright St John Ervine (1883-1971) was born in a working-class neighbourhood in Belfast and in 1901 at the age of eighteen moved to London to work as a clerk. There he became involved in the Fabian Society. He was officially elected to its membership in 1907 and served as treasurer of the Fabian Nursery, a sub-group with the aim of educating young people in the tenets of Fabianism. While in London, he wrote plays set in Belfast that dealt with class and religion and reflected his conviction that sectarianism was at the heart of labour problems in the north of Ireland. Ervine envisaged Home Rule as a solution to sectarianism and thought that it would precipitate the union of Protestant and Catholic workers in the struggle for economic equality. However, the London-centrism of the Fabian Society impeded an understanding of St John Ervine's work and reflected the society's fundamental ambivalence to the relationship between capital and empire.

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Online ISSN 1477-4569

Print ISSN 1363-3554

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