

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer



With contributions from Sinn Fein, Tony Benn, Geoff Bell, Stan Crooke, Patrick Murphy and John O'Mahony.

A Workers' Ireland pamphlet. £1.

50 48

To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissension, and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter...

Wolfe Tone.

In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government...the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority.

This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc.

1913 Resolution of the Bolshevik Party Central Committee.

There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Socialist slogan that serves only to 'sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism' without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of *how* (Marxists) will solve the problem when (they) assume power. A 'negative' slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not 'sharpen' but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation.

Lenin.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

2

Ireland: the socialist answer

20 YEARS

4

Since 1968: what has happened and why

12

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

14

Socialist Organiser debates Sinn Fein

22

Hillsborough and Sunningdale

23

Is an independent Northern Ireland possible?

24

Dates and events

25

For a federal united Ireland

THE LEFT

27

Lies the left tells itself

30

More Loyalist than the

Loyalists: *a criticism by Geoff Bell*

30

Marxism or Catholic chauvinism: *a reply to Geoff Bell*

33

How to argue for troops out: *Geoff Bell takes issue with our assessment of the debate in the labour movement*

35

The need to link the issues: *reply to Geoff Bell*

37

When the 26 Counties voted to ban divorce

38

Labour's 'unity by consent': *an interview with Clive Soley MP*

40

Tony Benn on Ireland

41

A reply to Tony Benn

THE REPUBLICANS

42

Who was James Connolly?

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

46

Is Sinn Fein socialist?

50

Stop the military campaign!

51

Provos and Protestants

FOR THE RECORD

52

Some economic facts

53

A Catholic state for a Catholic people?

53

What do the Irish people want?

54

The Workers' Party

54

Why bread-and-butter workers' unity is not the answer

56

Militant's record on Ireland

58

Our record on Ireland

61

How not to argue for withdrawal (*continued from back cover*)

64

Socialist Worker and 'Troops out'

Back cover

How not to argue for withdrawal: *a review of Paul Foot's new pamphlet on Ireland.*

The articles in this pamphlet are mostly reprinted or adapted from Socialist Organiser and Workers' Liberty. The author of the major articles is John O'Mahony, and other authors include Geoff Bell, Tony Benn, Liz Millward, Patrick Murphy, and Martin Thomas. This Workers' Ireland pamphlet is published as a special issue of Socialist Organiser, no.405-6, 13 June 1989. Published by Socialist Organiser, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, and printed by Press Link International (UK) Ltd (TU). Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.

Workers' Ireland I

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

For too long there has been almost no real discussion on the British or Irish left about the impasse in Northern Ireland. Each group has its slogans, but there is almost no common ground even on the basic facts of the situation. Those on the left who support the Catholic revolt, and those who do not, might as well be talking about two different places.

We support the Catholic revolt; but we are also concerned for the Protestant workers and their rights. We have our own ideas about a way forward; and we also want to open dialogue and debate on the left where at present there is no communication at all.

That is why we have produced this pamphlet and other *Workers' Ireland* publications. This pamphlet is produced by supporters of *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers' Liberty*, but we hope in future to draw in a wider range of contributors. Send articles of controversy, criticism or comment to *Workers' Ireland*, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Protest as Army and RUC allow Orange march through Catholic area.
Photo: John Arthur (Reflex)

Ireland: the socialist answer

From the mid-1960s a sizeable minority of the people of the USA turned against the war

their government was waging in Vietnam. They marched, demonstrated and lobbied to force their government to stop the war.

This active opposition of a section of their own people was a major factor in making the Indochina war unwinnable for the mighty US government.

Since about 1972 opinion polls have more or less consistently shown that half or more than half the people of Britain do not want Britain to continue to rule Northern

Ireland, do not want the British troops there, and therefore do not want Britain to continue to spend British money and lives fighting the IRA. Influential newspapers like the *Daily Mirror* have favoured Troops Out for fifteen years or more.

Yet this vast swathe of British public opinion has had almost no influence on British government policy. Why? Many of those who want British troops out have a narrow-minded British nationalist attitude: 'let the mad Irish kill each

**IRELAND:
The
Socialist
Answer**

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

other'. The effect of this on British policy is to license any brutality of policy, attitude and utterance the government chooses to indulge in. And that is the only influence that the segment of British public opinion which favours troops out has had on British government policy.

Troops out sentiment is overwhelmingly passive and cynical. No powerful movement exists to mobilise and agitate on the question. For nearly two decades the organised 'troops out' movement has consisted of tiny groups of left-wingers, mostly sympathisers of the Irish Republican movement. Many of these 'troops out' activists are moved to activity by seeing the Republican movement and the struggle of the Catholics in Northern Ireland as playing a role in some preconceived scenario of 'world revolution' or 'permanent revolution' — a vision which cannot possibly broaden forces.

'Time To Go' has achieved a bigger involvement of activists than any similar initiative for some time partly because it talks of more than troops out, and through the voice of Clare Short MP it links troops out inextricably with a political settlement.

Now conscription in the USA made the Indochina war a big part of the lives of a generation, while there is no conscription in Britain. The casualty levels in Northern Ireland are far lower than the rates of death through violent crime in many American cities, and qualitatively below the levels suffered by the US soldiers in Vietnam. That is one reason why the public opinion for troops out has little bite in British politics. But it explains only part of the arresting contrast with the USA.

Much more central is the fact that the troops out majority in opinion polls is made up of people with vastly different attitudes, from Britain-first reactionaries to those who believe that the IRA is leading the Irish socialist revolution and vehemently support it for that reason. The troops out current is not so much a current as an arithmetic sum of people who agree only negatively — against British troops remaining — but disagree entirely on positive answers.

For Vietnam the negative opposi-

tion to US troops remaining clearly implied a positive solution, whether you accepted it reluctantly or welcomed it enthusiastically — let the Vietnamese nationalists take over. Northern Ireland is far more complex.

The history of the relations between the two islands of Britain and Ireland is that of England as predator for centuries, and Ireland as prey. It is a history of British ruling-class oppression and exploitation, and of repeated Irish risings for freedom. But it is also a history shaped and marked by the interpenetration of the peoples of the two islands over the centuries.

Today Ireland is divided between two peoples of different and conflicting identities and allegiances. In the north-east of the island the majority is, and for centuries has been, the people who used to be called (by James Connolly, too) Ulster Scots.

Yes, the existing partition of Ireland is a brutal outrage against the majority of the people of Ireland, a botched, clumsy piece of British imperialist policy. It supposedly set out to give the Protestants of the north-east self-government against the rest of the Irish, but in so doing created a second, artificial, Irish minority, the Six Counties Catholics, who are a bigger proportion of the Six Counties population than the Protestants would be as a proportion of the 32 Counties of all Ireland.

This way of dealing with the conflict between the Irish majority and minority was only possible because of the alliance of the Protestants with the dominant section of the British ruling class in the early part of this century.

The bedrock fact, however, remains: a sizeable minority of the people on the island, the compact majority in the north-east, do not want to be part of a united Ireland under a Catholic majority — and have been willing to fight against being forced into it.

The hundred years since the first Home Rule Bill which Gladstone introduced into the House of Commons at the beginning of 1886 have demonstrated conclusively that the Irish majority's desire for Irish independence and its desire for Irish unity are incompatible. On top of that basic problem, the British rul-

ing class has erected structures such as partition which have made relations between the Catholics and Protestants even more antagonistic and poisonous.

So Britain is both a bully in Ireland, and the ally of a sizeable chunk of the Irish people. British troops out without a political settlement would mean not a united Ireland, nor any solution that would freely be chosen by a majority of either community, but bloody civil war and repartition.

It is such complexities which render the troops out mood in Britain impotent. The mood for troops out can only be a contributory force for a settlement, for peace and democracy, if it is linked to a search for positive solutions and to a discussion of particular proposals.

Yet the lack of positive policy among those advocating troops out is as glaring, as obvious, and as crippling on the left as in the broader population. The simple slogan 'Troops out', with 'now' usually added for emphasis, and perhaps the reassuring footnote that 'Socialism is the only answer', has been the staple of much of the hard left over the last 15 to 20 years.

The left has refused to discuss the real complexities and problems of the British-Irish relationship. That is why the left has made so little headway, has mobilised so scantily, counts for so little, and has failed for 15 years to do anything with a mass vague mood for troops out.

The articles in this pamphlet are selected and adapted from *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers' Liberty* to do two things: to provide facts and analysis about the real situation in Ireland; and to discuss the options and perspectives in that situation. Before the labour movement and the left can help solve the tragic conflict in Ireland, it must sort itself out.

Sean Matgamna

Workers' Ireland 3

Since 1968: what has happened and why

I. Before 1968: Moves for reform from above and below

For four years or so before 1968 Northern Ireland had been shaken up and destabilised. In October 1968 it blew up.

The British Labour government had been openly putting pressure on the Protestant sectarian regime in Stormont to stop being sectarian, to stop discrimination against Catholics, and to stop repressing them. The British government plainly no longer considered the partition of Ireland to be in Britain's interest.

The prospects ahead were that Britain and Ireland would both soon join the EEC. Relations between Britain and the 26 Counties were better than for many years. In 1965 the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement was signed. The British government had the bones of Sir Roger Casement dug up out of their grave at Pentonville jail, where Casement was buried after they hanged him in 1916, and returned to Ireland with much ceremony, as if symbolically to lay the ghosts of past conflicts. Six County Prime Minister O'Neill visited Dublin and Taoiseach Sean Lemass visited Belfast.

The Southern Irish economy was in its best shape for a quarter century. On the surface it seemed to be a time of amicable reconstruction, readjustment and rational reconstruction. The contradiction that changed these prospects so dramatically lay in Northern Ireland itself, which proved beyond the power of Britain — or of Britain and the Southern Irish bourgeoisie together — to control.

For 30 years Northern Ireland had been ruled as a "Protestant state for Protestant people" (long-time Northern

Ireland Prime Minister Lord Brookeborough). The Catholics were a big and threatening hostile minority of about one in three who had been kept in the Six County state against their will in 1921. Chronic antagonism was therefore built into the Six Counties state. The Protestants repressed the Catholics, organising a special sectarian part-time wing of the police, the B-Specials, to do so.

The built a solid Protestant bloc, involving all classes from slum Protestants to horse Protestants, against the Catholic minority. Partly for political reasons, but also because there was great scarcity and poverty, they systematically discriminated against Catholics.

More Catholics were unemployed than Protestants; run-down areas where unemployment never dropped below the Great Depression level, even during the years of the boom in the '40s, '50s and '60s, tended to be Catholic areas. Politics was largely communal-sectarian politics — Catholic against Protestant. Catholics were cheated of local democracy: the system long discarded in Britain of giving business people one vote for every business premises continued in Northern Ireland where it hit the poorer Catholic community. Areas with big Catholic majorities — Derry City for example — were blatantly gerrymandered to give the Protestant/Unionist minority control of the local council. Because votes went with houses, Catholic housing was among the worst in Western Europe.

There was systematic anti-Catholic discrimination in employment. The Harland and Wolff shipyard, and the big engineering works, employed practically no Catholics. The Sirocco Engineering Works in East Belfast, standing in the Catholic enclave of the Short Strand where there was 70% unemployment, had four Catholics out of 600 workers in the mid-'70s. As a direct consequence of this, the composition of the trade unions was tilted heavily against the Catholics.

The unions remained united on day-to-day trade unionism, on a basis of tacit acceptance of these discriminatory

practices and agreement not to raise political questions concerning the Six Counties' constitution. Trade union unity was unity of the privileged with the oppressed on the terms laid down by the privileged — the status quo in industry and on the Six Counties' constitutional position.

At the top, where prominent people often were leftists or had a left-wing past — like, for example, Betty Sinclair, the Stalinist secretary of the Belfast Trades Council — trade unions and trades councils could sometimes be got to pass 'progressive' or liberal resolutions, but these were not representative of the Orange majority of the Northern Ireland labour movement. Unity in the Northern Ireland trade unions was a fragile thing. The threat of a split on the constitutional questions was always present, staved off by political paralysis and tacit agreement to avoid splitting issues.

The situation was the same with the political labour movement. In the '60s the Northern Ireland Labour Party had a socialist left-wing in Derry and Belfast. But it was a Unionist, that is a fundamentally Protestant, party. Time and again, throughout its history, it had been disrupted by conflicting positions on 'the constitutional question'. Always for the status quo, it attempted to broaden its support, sometimes by playing down its Unionist character, sometimes by trickery. In the '40s for example, the NILP agitated in the Falls Road under the Irish tricolour; in the Shankhill under the Union Jack, and in the city centre under the Red Flag! Inevitably this party fell apart, repeatedly.

The Protestant workers were a privileged layer. Their privileges were marginal — but nevertheless big privileges. Leon Trotsky once remarked that the greatest possible privilege is to have a crust of bread when everybody else is starving. To have, as part of the Protestant ruling bloc, a considerably better chance of a job amongst mass unemployment, was no small privilege.

Sectarianism was no surface part of Northern Ireland, but basic to it. It was a society flawed right through along the lines of the Catholic and Protestant communities. In the late '60s and early '70s it split vertically along the lines of the communal divide, not horizontally along the lines of class.

This was the problem for Britain's reforming drive in the mid '60s. The upper-class Orange and Unionist leaders were willing to make timid moves

**IRELAND:
The
Socialist
Answer**



Demo in Newry after Bloody Sunday

towards reform; the Protestant working-class ranks became very alarmed that reform would be at their expense. At first this was a slow process. Around 1966, Ian Paisley, the most vocal representative of that alarm, still seemed an archaic crank. But the first killings occurred in 1966, when a Protestant secret army, the UVF, killed a Catholic barman suspected by them of having IRA connections.

But at first, in the mid-'60s, the Protestant backlash was limited, and seemed like it could be easily contained. The Catholic agitation that now got under way, to add pressure from below to the British government's pressure for reform from above, turned the Protestant backlash into a powerful mass movement.

The Catholics began to agitate for 'civil rights' — one man (sic) one job, one man one house, one man one vote. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formed in 1967. It was a broad coalition led by Republicans who had renounced the gun — at least for the moment — green nationalist politicians, Stalinists, and socialists of various sorts. Inevitably their demands were taken by the Protestants to be demands to divide up the existing jobs and homes.

It is possible that these 'civil rights' demands could have been rendered more palatable to the Protestant workers if expressed in some way as this: create jobs by building more houses, etc. However, it is not at all certain.

The implications of the Catholic movement went way beyond what they demanded. The fundamental civil right the Catholics lacked was the right of self-determination — the fact that they were an artificial minority within an artificial state, carved out against the will of the big majority of the people of Ireland. From that flowed the possibility of discrimination and repression in the Orange sectarian state. It was not just ultra-sensitive Unionist politicians like the Stormont Home Secretary William Craig who saw that the logic of any such mainly-Catholic movement would lead it straight to the question of Northern Ireland's constitutional status. The leaders of the 'Official' Republicans, who were heavily involved in the civil rights agitation, did see it as the first stage in a mass mobilisation that would, when the time was ripe, raise 'the national question'. Protestants tended to see any movement of Catholics as a threat to 'the constitution'.

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

2. 1968-9: The Northern Ireland state down breaks

This was the background to the events of October 1968. Home Secretary William Craig banned the civil rights demonstration in Derry, and the police enforced the ban by baton charges when it was defied. World TV audiences saw the Republican Labour MP for West Belfast, Gerry Fitt, with blood streaming from a head wound caused by a police baton. Most importantly, people in Britain saw it.

From that moment on, the Protestant-majority Unionist government at Stormont was on the defensive. Northern Ireland was world headline news. The pressure for reform intensified. William Craig was sacked from the Stormont government. The Protestant working class became increasingly alarmed at the prospect of being 'sold out'. The Protestant backlash grew bigger and began to reflect itself inside the ruling Unionist Party.

One of the main Northern Ireland responses to the bloody events in Derry was the creation of a powerful movement of students to agitate for civil rights — People's Democracy (which should not be confused with the present organisation of that name, though the two do have some links). PD was based on Queen's University, Belfast, had initially had many Protestant members. Outrage by police brutality at home, they were influenced by the world-wide student radicalisation of that time, which elsewhere focused on organising protests and solidarity with the Vietnamese against the US Army in Vietnam. Most of the leaders of PD were Marxist socialists.

PD agitated and marched — often very provocatively — for civil rights. The Orange backlash grew. The Unionist Party went into ferment and crisis. Prime Minister Terence O'Neill was a feeble politician nurtured in a political system in which gentry like himself could take the loyalty and deference of the lower orders for granted. He could not cope.

Central to what happened in the next three years was the incapacity of the Unionist upper-class elite to carry the

Protestant masses with them on reform. Every Catholic, or pro-Catholic, action stirred up and agitated the Protestant ranks, feeding the backlash. The elite could control neither the one nor the other, and the system was ground to bits between the two. O'Neill resigned in early 1969, to be replaced by another ex-Army man, his cousin Chichester-Clark.

In January 1969 police rioted in Derry's Bogside, the Catholic slum area built outside the walls of the one-time Protestant city of Londonderry. The Catholics erected barricades to keep them out.

Serious rioting occurred in July. Then in August the upper-class Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, staged a provocative march on the walls overlooking the Catholic slums. Bitter clashes occurred, which became full-scale warfare between the police, the sectarian B-Special constables and assorted Paisleyites on the one side, and the Catholics of the Bogside on the other.

Barricades were set up, and the Bogsiders held off the forces of the state using stones and petrol-bombs. Protestant bigots attacked Catholic areas in West Belfast, and the same thing happened there. The Southern Ireland Prime Minister said that the South could not "stand idly by". The Northern Ireland state seemed about to dissolve into sectarian civil war. On August 13th the British Army was moved onto the streets to stop the state falling apart. It quickly took control in Belfast and Derry.

The Catholics welcomed the Army as saviours — but they didn't take their barricades down. The Catholics of Derry and Belfast had seceded from the Northern Ireland state, for the moment. The barricades would stay up, patrolled on the outside by the British Army armed with machine guns and rifles, and on the inside by Catholics agreed with hurleys, until the Catholics agreed to take them down in October.

This was the first crucial turning point. The Northern Ireland state had shown itself to be unreformable. It had been designed to serve the Protestant majority and they had a built-in majority against any change they didn't want. The Labour government had to decide what to do. As well as sending in the army, it sent in a bevy of civil servants to oversee the chief Northern Ireland civil servants, thus seriously curtailing the independence of the Northern Ireland government. That's all the British Labour government did.

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

6 Workers' Ireland

Instead of recognising that the system had to be radically dismantled and restructured, it left it essentially in being, tinkering with it. But a process had begun that would end with the abolition of Stormont in March 1972, thus depriving the Protestant majority, whose right to self-determination the Six County state allegedly gives expression to, of the right to exercise that majority in any local political structures.

The events of August-October 1969 set Northern Ireland on a new trajectory, though that was not clear at the

time. The youth in the Catholic areas had been roused up and radicalised, and were deflated and disappointed when the barricades came down in October 1969. The crisis in the Unionist Party continued, under pressure on one side from the British government to reform and on the other from the Protestant population against 'selling them out' to the Catholics or 'Dublin'. Chichester-Clark resigned in 1970, to be replaced by the tougher, less genteel and altogether less effete Brian Faulkner.

3. 1969-70: The failure of the socialists, the rise of the Provos

Paradoxically, this period saw the high point of socialism in Northern Ireland. Most of the prominent Catholic activists or representatives were socialists — the exceptions were middle-class civil rights people like John Hume, and even they allied with 'socialists' like Gerry Fitt MP and called the party they set up in 1970 the Social Democratic and Labour Party. (Mainly Catholic, it then included some Protestants, like Ivan Cooper MP.) PD ceased to be an amorphous student movement in late '69 and started agitating for socialism and on social questions. The PD-associated MP for Mid-Ulster, Bernadette Devlin, elected in 1969, was a revolutionary socialist, who worked closely in Britain with groups like IS (SWP) and, briefly, the SLL (WRP). (Today she is hardly distinguishable from a Republican).

All the leading activists in Derry were socialists, with the leading role falling to the Derry Labour Party, led by Eamonn McCann. In Derry almost all the Republicans were socialists, and some were influenced by Trotskyism. Most of these socialists did appeal on a class basis to the Protestant workers, before and after August 1969. Even in its wild and provocative student days, PD appealed to Protestant workers to see that socially they had a common interest with Catholic workers. They all carefully tried to avoid appearing as Catholics or traditional Republicans.

For example, a PD leader, Cyril Toman, who was then a sort of Trotskyist, tried to get a hearing from Protestant workers by flying a Union Jack over his platform! Today Cyril Toman is in Sinn Fein, and in 1983 was one of its Parliamentary candidates.

All the socialists made *Militant*-style denunciations of the idea that there could be a non-socialist united Ireland. Only in a socialist Ireland could the Protestant's legitimate fears that Home Rule would be Rome Rule be allayed. 'Neither Thames nor Tiber', the most Republican of them said, meaning no Irish unification apart from socialism.



They roundly abused the 'Green Tory' Republic and marched across the border waving illegal condoms in the faces of the 26 County police.

By contrast the Republicans were eclipsed. Shamed and split by their inability to defend the Catholic areas in August 1969, they seemed to count for little — and anyway the main body of Republicans were socialists too.

The high point for socialism was the election of June 1970. The Northern Ireland Labour Party refused to endorse Eamonn McCann as a candidate, and he stood with the backing of the Derry and Coleraine Labour Parties. He advocated troops out and socialism, which he defined as nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. McCann got 8,000 votes.

There were lots of socialists, many of them Trotskyists of one sort or another. The problem was that they were largely confined to the Catholic community. Individual Protestants were socialists, of course. Though the big student Protestant support for civil rights fell away very quickly, some stayed — for example, Ronnie Bunting, son of a prominent associate of Ian Paisley, who joined PD

and was reputed to be 'Chief of Staff' of the Irish National Liberation Army when he was murdered in 1981. But these were individuals. The Protestant working class remained impervious to appeals.

Sections of it were 'radicalising' and separating off from the traditional Unionist leaders. But they were going to Paisleyism. Their radicalism was diffuse, sectional, fuelled in part by fear of the Catholics in the Six Counties and in a possible united Ireland.

Any class feeling was strictly confined within their communal framework. If they recognised similar people in similar conditions to their own across the communal divide, they did not go on to conclude that there was a common interest. Communalism shaped and limited everything. Northern Ireland's society split vertically along communal lines in 1969 and after; and when the Protestant community split horizontally, it had no significance for class politics — it was an affair internal to the Protestant community. That is the basic tragedy of Northern Ireland politics in the last 15 years: that workers' disillusionment with the Orange bosses served only to build the Paisleyite Democratic Unionist Party.

The Catholics and their representatives — in the first place the socialists — could and did propose working class unity. But they could not impose it on the Protestants, nor even get a dialogue with the Protestants. It is normally thus when an oppressed layer moves, frightening the upper layers.

For example, who can doubt that the US blacks would, given a chance, have chosen unity with the white workers in the '50s and '60s? Unity was not on offer on any terms other than the continued subordination of the blacks. The '60s black revolt, with riots and burning cities, followed, 'alienating' white workers. That was tragic, as were the parallel events and relationships in Northern Ireland. But those are poor Marxists who would (or did) therefore conclude that our job was to tell the oppressed patiently to bear their burden.

Many activists agreed that 'socialism was the only road', but there can be no socialism without the working class — in this case, crucially, the Protestant working class — so that road was not open.

The consequence for the radicalised Catholic youth was isolation from the main body of the working class and working-class movement — and impotence. The ground was prepared for the Provisionals' campaign by the impotence, and by the attempts of the socialists to avoid the national question.

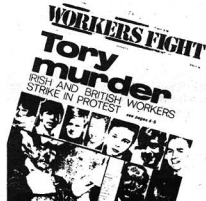
As we saw, all the socialists, including the socialist Republicans, steered clear of the national question or renounced it (some of the Republicans hypocritically, tactically). That left the national question and 'anti-imperialism' entirely in the hands of the Provisional — initially, right-wing — Republicans.

Cyril Toman — the Marxist of '69, waging his Union Jack at Protestant workers so that they would let him talk to them about socialism, who became

the Sinn Fein candidate of '83 — symbolises and sums up this tragic experience.

The Republican movement had come out of World War II, in which it had allied with Germany, pulverised and seemingly defunct. It made a principle of physical force and of boycotting the various parliaments (Dublin, Belfast, London) and apart from that was 'non-political'. In fact it reflected the right-wing cold-war atmosphere of Catholic Ireland in the '40s and '50s. It revived slowly in the post-war period, and in 1956 launched a military campaign of small guerilla actions on the Border. This soon petered out and eventually, in 1962, a formal 'ceasefire' was declared.

Trying to learn from their experience, some of the leading activists turned 'left' and began to talk of using social agitation to gain support for 'the national struggle'. They drew on half-forgotten experiences of left-wing Republicanism in the '30s, when left-moving traditional Republicans met the right-moving Stalinised Communist Party of Ireland, and together they created a sort of populist Republicanism. The immediate task was to win national independence ('the Republic'; for the Stalinists, 'the bourgeois-democratic revolution'); then socialism would come at the next stage.



In the '60s, too, the leftward-moving Republicans met Stalinists and were influenced by them, in the first place by Dr Roy Johnstone, who went onto the Army Council.

One product of the Republicans' turn to social questions was that they became involved in the civil rights movement. They began to disarm the IRA, expelling dissidents, benefitting from the dropping-away of many traditional activists.

The events of August 1969 changed the direction of the IRA too. They were largely irrelevant during the fighting, the 'Chief of Staff' Goulding being reduced to making idle public threats. Militants were told that the problem was that the IRA had lent its guns to the Free Wales Army!

In December 1969 and January 1970 the Republican movement split. The break-aways were traditionalists. Many, like David O'Connell, were veterans of what little action there had been in the '50s. Others, like Joe Cahill — sentenced to death but reprieved because of his age, while 19-year-old Tom Williams was

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

hanged, in 1942 — went back even further. They denounced the 'communism' of the mainstream Republicans, though they too called themselves socialists — democratic socialists. The Provisionals' prospects did not seem very bright: for example, J. Bowyer Bell, the author of a learned academic study of the IRA published in 1970, dismissed them as a moribund relic of the past who could not keep up with the development of the mainstream.

In fact the Provos grew with astonishing speed. They recruited rapidly from the disillusioned Catholic youth.

Fianna Fail money helped launch the Provos, but to explain the development of their movement as a result of ruling class divide-and-rule is self-evidently inadequate, and no more than a conspiracy theory of history. As well to explain the Russian Revolution as a German plot because the German general staff allowed Lenin to cross Germany in a sealed train. Fianna Fail wanted to split and stop the left-wing Republican movement. They did not want what the Provos very rapidly became.

Eamonn McCann has described the Provo's appeal like this. Whereas everyone talked about socialism and 'imperialism', but had nothing to suggest doing about it in the circumstances, the Provos could point to the British soldier standing at the local street corner and say: 'There, that's imperialism. Shoot it.'

The determined avoidance of the national question by the left and the official Republicans — who consigned it to the distant future, together with a socialism that had to wait on the Protestant workers — ensured that the national question, which lay at the heart of the subordinate and oppressed position of the Catholics, was raised, when it inevitably forced its way to the front, in the Provos' initially right-wing version.

The Provos could, of course, also draw on the Catholic-Republican culture — songs, history, ingrained loyalties — with which the Catholic community was saturated. In late '69 a staunch old-style Republican like ex-internee Sean Keenan seemed a respected anachronism: within a year or 18 months, people like that were the centre of a powerful movement which had taken in many of the radicalised youth eager to 'shoot imperialism'. One consequence of this was that the Provisional Republican movement would itself become radicalised, especially in Belfast and Derry — though its radicalism was within the limits of one community.

4. 1970-72: Growth of IRA and UDA. Direct rule

By early 1970 relations between the British Army and the Catholics had deteriorated badly. The sort of reforms the civil rights movement had called for had quickly been rushed through after August 1969. The B-Specials were disbanded, the RUC disarmed. But things had gone too far. These measures — especially the disbandment of the B-Specials — alarmed the Protestants but failed to satisfy the Catholics.

The army was a crude and brutal tool for police work. Balancing between the communities, it inevitably began to reflect the real balance of the Six County state — which favours the Protestants. The election of a Tory government in June 1970 replaced a Labour government which had learned to have some sensitivity towards the feelings of the Catholics with Tories whose parliamentary allies were the Unionists of Northern Ireland.

A major turning-point in Army/Catholic relations came in July 1970. Protestants attacked a Catholic church in the Lower Falls and the Official IRA shot three of them dead. The Army, perhaps to placate Protestant anger and 'keep the balance' then declared a curfew on the Lower Falls and a systematic search of the area for arms. Bloody clashes followed with the Official IRA.

In early 1971 the Provisional IRA killed three British soldiers and things began to move towards a military-style confrontation. But it was still limited. The decisive turn came on August 9 1971, with the introduction of internment. Few IRA men were rounded up, but various political opponents of the Faulkner Stormont government were, like PD leader Michael Farrell. If they had wanted to give the allegiance of the Catholic community to the two IRAs, then Faulkner and Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath could not have made a better job of it. Now it became a full-scale Catholic insurrection, with the Provisional IRA gaining more support. Bombings and killings escalated enormously. So did the Protestant backlash.

The Protestant UDA was founded in late '71 and became a mass movement of

perhaps 50,000 by mid-'72.

This phase ended in March 1972, when the Tory government decided to destroy the 52-year old sectarian structures of Northern Ireland and start again. Stormont was abolished. The IRA had gained a tremendous victory. Everything seemed to be in the melting pot — and it was. Quarter of a million Protestant workers struck in protest.

The Provos' military campaign deepened and widened the gap between Protestants and Catholics. It did not create it. In terms of the basic cause and effect, the Provos and their campaign were a product of the Catholic/Protestant division which had rendered impotent the Catholic radicals in 1969 and afterwards.

Everything was in the melting pot — but only within the given Northern Ireland framework. The Tories acted more vigorously and radically than Labour had, but they were even less inclined than Labour to face the fact that Northern Ireland was a failed entity, in a state of latent or incipient civil war — increasingly ungovernable.

In 1972 Protestant barricades went up throughout Belfast. Catholic barricades had gone up again in Belfast and Derry after 'Bloody Sunday' — January 30, when the British Army shot and killed 14 unarmed Catholics taking part in a banned Republican demonstration in Derry.

The Provos declared a ceasefire in mid-'72, and the mighty British government decided to negotiate with them. Republican and Loyalist prisoners were given special political prisoner status. Provisional IRA leaders — among them Gerry Adams, now MP for West Belfast — were flown to London for discussions. Nothing came of it at all. The British were willing to change the way Northern Ireland was run, but not to change Northern Ireland. The armed mass movement of the Protestants paralysed any impulses they may have had to make basic changes. They stuck to their commitment to maintain the Six County state. And that meant balancing between the communities.

This balancing led to a breakdown of the truce with the IRA. Many hundreds of Catholics had been made homeless by sectarian intimidation, but when an attempt was made to re-house them in houses vacated by Protestants the Army intervened with a heavy hand to stop it, and the Provisional IRA went back to the gun. An Official IRA ceasefire in the same period remained in being, and still does.

Northern Ireland had never been closer to open communal civil war than in mid-'72. Civil war didn't come. Instead there occurred a hurricane of sectarian assassinations, mostly of Catholics by Protestants, which continued through to 1974 and beyond. The British government placated the Protestants by forcibly taking down the Catholic barricades in July 1972. Tension eased. The war between the British Army and the Provisional IRA resumed fiercely. IRA bombs continued to blast the centres of Northern Ireland's cities.

5. 1973-4: Britain's moves for reform shattered by the Protestants

Britain now moved energetically to re-erect a self-governing system in Northern Ireland, calling on the aid of the Southern Irish government. A series of talks, with Unionist and Catholic politicians and with the Southern Irish government, culminated in the 'Sunningdale Agreement' on a new system in Northern Ireland. The new system would have institutionalised power-sharing in the Six Counties and a loose and rather powerless 'Council of Ireland' would take account of Northern Ireland Catholics' desire for Irish unity. Britain promised a referendum to determine whether the Northern Ireland majority wanted Irish unity. (The referendum was held in March 1973; of course, the majority did not want unity.)

The old Unionist Party, for 50 years Northern Ireland's monolithic ruling party, had broken up in 1972. Now the Unionists fragmented further. The Paisleyites — now very much more than

a fringe group — and William Craig's 'Vanguard' were marching and drilling and making blood-curdling threats, while some of their followers were slaughtering individual Catholics at random. The Unionists divided into those willing to work the new system Britain wanted and those who were either against it or thought it could not be carried with the Protestant masses. On the Catholic side, the pro-power-sharing SDLP had the electoral support of the mass of Catholics: Sinn Fein was not allowed to stand in the elections for the new Assembly.

On 1 January 1974 the new power-sharing executive came into being. It was a coalition of a Unionist minority, led by Brian Faulkner; the SDLP; and some tiny parties like the non-sectarian liberal Unionists, Alliance, and the no less Unionist Northern Ireland Labour Party. The Paisleyites and other die-hard bigots were ghettoised, accounting for about one-third of the Assembly. They

**IRELAND:
The
Socialist
Answer**



IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

6. 1974-80: 'Sweating it out'

shouted, rioted and disrupted the work of the Assembly. To no avail. Though the Faulknerites were under tremendous pressure and had broken election pledges against power-sharing, the SDLP-Faulknerite alliance held and began to get a grip on Northern Ireland.

A dramatic shift had occurred, for the stable mainstay of this regime was the SDLP. Britain had shifted its weight heavily onto the middle-class Catholic party. The die-hard Orangemen appeared isolated and impotent. There was reason to think that massive government patronage and a vigorous reform policy — for which Britain had the resources and the will to pay — would gradually rally a sizeable Protestant support around the Faulknerites. The power-sharing executive seemed to have years of life ahead of it. The IRA was still active but it seemed to be in decline.

But now the British class struggle intervened. In February 1974 the British Tory government called an election on the issue, 'Who rules, the unions or the government?', hoping thereby to gain the political and moral authority they needed to defeat the British miners. Heath lost the election. In Northern Ireland what was lost was the entire government strategy.

The Westminster election took the die-hard Orange politicians out of the Stormont ghetto in which they had been confined; it forced Brian Faulkner's party to face the Orange electorate they had tricked in the Northern Ireland election six months before. The result was a catastrophe for power-sharing. Of 12 Northern Ireland Westminster seats, no less than 11 were won by opponents of power-sharing (the other was Gerry Fitt's). The moral authority of the power-sharing executive was undermin-

ed. It staggered on until May 1974, when a majority vote in favour of activating the Council of Ireland provision triggered a powerful general strike.

The Unionists had already used their industrial muscle on a number of occasions. In early 1971 thousands of Harland and Wolff shipyard workers had marched to demand that internment for suspected Republicans be introduced. In March 1972 a quarter of a million struck when Stormont was abolished. (To get an equivalent British figure you would have to multiply by either 60 or 40 — depending on whether you take the strikers as a proportion of the Protestant population or of the whole Six County population — to get 15 or 10 million!)

Now, in May 1974, there was a full-scale general strike. Intimidation by the UDA was used to get it going — but it soon became clear that it had real support. It was a revolutionary general strike — for utterly reactionary objectives. The strikers were against the power-sharing executive and the Council of Ireland and for a restoration of 'majority rule' in the Six Counties — that is, Protestant rule. The official Northern Ireland trade unions attempted to fight the reactionary strike, and, protected by the Army, organised a march back to work. Only a handful of people turned up, taking their lives in their hands to walk behind TUC secretary Len Murray and local trade union leaders. It was a fiasco. Nobody who knew the Northern Ireland labour movement would have expected anything else when the official unions came into conflict with their Protestant rank and file. The British Army was powerless and, maybe, the officers did not want to act against the strike. After two weeks the Faulknerites resigned and the power-sharing executive collapsed.

It was the decisive turning point for the period which opened with the abolition of the old Protestant home rule Parliament in March 1972. The British government had proved unable to face down the Protestants and had allowed its entire strategy of political reconstruction to be shattered. What now?

The Labour government refused to admit that this strategy was in ruins. It announced that there would be new elections for a Northern Ireland assembly. This time its function would be to work out a political system for the province acceptable to both Catholics and Protestants on the basis of some sort of power-sharing.

Elections were duly held, and the Faulknerites, the moderate compromising Unionists willing to work the system Britain wanted, were massacred. There followed a full year of discussion, bargaining, demonstrating, posturing and manoeuvring in the Convention. Spectacular shifts took place, for example when William Craig — the man scapegoated by O'Neill for the batoning of peaceful demonstrators in October 1969, the founder of 'Vanguard' and associate of the Protestant paramilitaries — came out for a variant of power-sharing. He was immediately disowned by his supporters. No deal was possible. The canny politicians who might be willing to try didn't dare — and had they dared then they like Craig would have been repudiated.

The Protestants had won victory in May 1974 — and they wanted victory in the Convention. There was widespread fear in the Catholic community that the Protestant majority would organise some sort of political coup, declaring a new government and set a train of events in motion which would trigger sectarian civil war. For most of 1975 the Provisional IRA observed a ceasefire. Finally, early in 1976, the Convention sent a report to London which demanded majority rule, not power-sharing, and the British government dissolved the Convention.

The British government was stuck with direct rule. The only political struc-

Workers' Ireland 9

20 Years

ture that could be set up in Northern Ireland would correspond with the nature of Northern Ireland — with its in-built artificial Protestant majority. This put Britain in the absurd position of justifying the Northern Ireland entity and Partition in terms of defending the democratic rights of the Protestant majority while it was forced to deny the Protestant majority the exercise of its majority rights in that Northern Ireland unit!

But logic didn't come into it. The British government sought the line of least resistance and after the Orange general strike that meant leaning heavily against the Catholics. The IRA was badly affected by the truces of 1975 — but it was still a force to be reckoned with, and now it began to reorganise.

Britain's policy now was signalled early in 1976 when the Labour minister responsible for Northern Ireland, Roy Mason, announced that from now on, convicted Republican and Loyalist activists would no longer have special status or prison regime that they had had since 1972. This was the 'criminalisation' policy. Inevitably it bore down far more heavily on the Catholics than the Protestants.

At the same time the war against the IRA became an intensive war against the people of the Catholic ghettos of Derry and Belfast. Thousands of Catholic homes were repeatedly searched and wrecked by the British army. Mason's policy was to sit tight, beat down the Catholics, and make neither attempt nor pretence at any new political initiative. Northern Ireland would be forced to 'sweat out' its sickness. For quite a while it seemed to be working. The IRA was in serious decline; the flesh fell off Protestant organisations like the UDA and they shrivelled into not much more than racketeering gangs. Bombings and killings became somewhat less frequent.

When in 1977 an attempt was made by Ian Paisley to get a new Orange general strike over 'security' it flopped. The majority of Protestant workers no longer felt under immediate and intense threat. They didn't respond and since not enough of them could be coerced, the second Orange 'general' strike was a fiasco. It had more to do with jockeying for position among Loyalist politicians than with anything else.

But the convulsions were not over — the processes were just hidden from view. The Provisional IRA reorganised itself on a tighter cell structure and geared itself towards what its strategists talked of as a 20-year war.

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

10 Workers' Ireland

Developments were germinating in the prison camps and jails that would allow the IRA to gain an unprecedented position of political dominance in the Catholic community.

For the Republicans did not accept Mason's criminalisation policy. Those convicted after the new rules came into force in early 1976 refused to comply with prison regulations. They refused to wear prison uniform, wearing blankets instead. Mason's criminalisation policy

opened one of the most terrible battles ever fought for their own dignity and political principles by political prisoners confronting a brutal and soulless prison system designed to degrade and demoralise them. Republican prisoners spent years 'on the blanket'. Some served out entire sentences and were released without ever wearing prison clothes. Slowly support built up outside, but it was never enough to have any effect.



7. 1980-85: The hunger strikes of 1980-81 and the Provos' turn to politics

The turning point came with the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981. The hunger strike of 1980 was called off before anyone died, the Republicans thinking that they had been promised changes. They hadn't. A new hunger strike started in Spring 1981, led by Bobby Sands, officer commanding the Provisional IRA prisoners at Long Kesh. While on hunger strike Sands was elected MP for Fermanagh-S. Tyrone, and it was Bobby Sands MP whom Mrs Thatcher allowed to starve to death in Long Kesh.

World-wide attention was now on Long Kesh. Support for the hunger strikers grew rapidly in the Northern Ireland Catholic community. It was a sign of the times that the SDLP did not dare stand against Sands and, by splitting the Catholic vote, deprived the Provisional IRA of a great propaganda boost. Sands was the first to die and nine others followed him. Like the execution of the 15 captured leaders of the 1916 rising, the slow and terrible deaths of the ten young Republicans in 1981 had a profound effect on Catholic Ireland.

As coffin after coffin came out of the gates of Long Kesh, the Provisionals gained massive support. They easily won the by-election caused by Bobby Sands' death, in mid-1981. On the other side of the Northern Ireland divide, Protestants reacted with great hostility to the giant Catholic funeral marches and to the very

successful propaganda campaign mounted by the Republicans and their supporters. Communal tensions became drum-tight.

The hunger strike ended in defeat. Would the support that the sacrifice of the hunger strikers had won for the Provisional IRA survive the end of the hunger strikes? They had had such support before. They had never been able to consolidate it or put it to any use. By now, however, they had learned some important lessons. Things had changed in the Republican movement.

The right-wing Provisional IRA had been steadily radicalised throughout the 1970s. The working-class Republicans in Belfast and Derry were always more radical than the typical petty-bourgeois. Sinn Féin supporters in the South. Steadily their influence grew. They talked of socialism with some conviction — though, unfortunately, without much clear definition, and, worse, as if it could be an affair of the Catholic community alone. One 'lesson' the left-wing Republicans in the Northern cities learned in the '70s was to give up on the Protestant workers. Side by side with their radicalisation went a more and more clear sectarianism — though in implication rather than intention — towards the Protestants.

Arguably much that they did was always sectarian. But the old guard paid at least lip service to the ideas and goals

of traditional Irish Republicanism, which proudly insisted that the whole people of Ireland were the Irish nation, whatever their origins or creed. The 1972 Provisional IRA policy for a federal Ireland with a nine county Ulster — adopted when it looked like they would soon win — was preposterous in some of its details but it contained the core idea of conciliating the Protestants. The most clear-cut expression of the sectarianism entwined with the radicalisation of the Northern Provisionals was their hostility to 'federalism', which they removed from Sinn Fein's constitution in 1981-2.

The Protestants must either be conciliated, or you try to conquer them: and without federalism and the possibility of autonomy, all that the Provos now offered the Protestants was incorporation as a minority in a heavily Catholic Ireland.

The dilemma of the Provisionals parallels that of the Republican socialists in 1968-70: they are a one-community movement, cut off from the majority of the Northern Ireland working class. They know it is the opposition of the Protestants — and specifically of the Protestant working class — that mainly stands in their way. Whereas the socialists of 1968-70 abjured, ignored or renounced the national question, the Provo radicals start from it and now they have an ill-defined socialism which abjures the majority of the Northern Ireland working class. The Provos of today, like the socialists of 1968-70, are therefore impotent to change Northern

Ireland, or Ireland.

But the Provisionals are a powerful force in the Catholic community. They learned from the hunger strike the value of politics, and have systematically turned to electioneering. Since 1982 they have consolidated a seemingly stable Catholic vote of not too far short of 40%. They define their new strategy as a combination of the ballot box and the gun — 'the Armalite in one hand, a ballot paper in the other'. They aim to make politics, and social agitation, serve the armed struggle. The SDLP was helped mightily by British favour in the early and mid-'70s; it has wasted and cracked in the political wilderness since 1976, shedding its odd socialists and Protestants, to become little more than a green nationalist party.

What is happening politically in the Catholic community now parallels the political polarisation and differentiation that occurred within Unionism at the beginning of the '70s. The Provos' enforced or voluntary abstention from political action slowed down that process in the Catholic community and allowed the SDLP a virtual monopoly of Catholic politics for a time. No more — the weakening of the SDLP, put out to starve in the no-politics wilderness after 1976, and the Provisionals' own turn to politics, has put an end to that. It is unlikely, however, that the Provisionals will politically annihilate the SDLP, and there is probably still much opposition inside the Provisionals to 'politics'.

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

8. Conclusion

Overall, the results of the years of turmoil are not encouraging from a working-class point of view. A chasm deep and wide divides the Protestant and Catholic workers. Bitterness which will in the best circumstances take a generation or two to heal has built up.

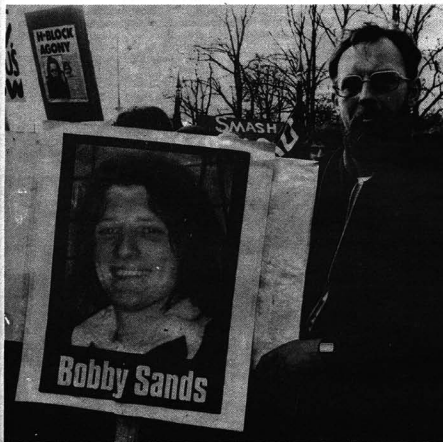
Despite severe crises in the South, since the '60s industry there has grown relatively fast, so that the social contrast between North and South — which at the time of Partition was a stark division between a relatively advanced industrial North and an impoverished mostly agricultural South — is greatly diminished. All this, however, has not generated a common feeling of working-class identity across the communal divide. It would be a miracle if it did.

Northern Ireland continues in a state of latent civil war. The British Army keeps the communities apart, but within a strategic British framework of maintaining the artificial sectarian state which keeps the Catholic-Protestant antagonism at near boiling point. Fundamentally the British Army is not a peace-keeper, but the military scaffolding erected to shore up the Six County state when it began to collapse into sectarian chaos in 1969 — in other words, to shore up the framework for the chronic communal antagonism. It keeps the communities apart by beating down the rebellious Catholics.

Britain's policy of holding the ring in Northern Ireland, tinkering occasionally with the political structures and beating down the Catholics as the staple activity, is stoking the fires of latent civil war. It maintains, just below boiling point, the conditions that could well develop into a Lebanese-style civil war in Northern Ireland, with mass communal slaughter and bloody repartition at the end of it.

The only way out of this situation is to recast the entire framework. The sectarian Northern Ireland state must be replaced by a broader framework within which the Catholic and Protestant communities can learn to live together. The Labour Party should commit itself to abolish the Six County sectarian state and to work for a federal united Ireland that will offer the fullest rights, guarantees and autonomy for the Protestant population that are compatible with the rights of the majority of the Irish people.

Workers' Ireland II



Theses on the Anglo-Irish agreement

1. What is the Anglo-Irish agreement?

The Anglo-Irish agreement sets up an inter-governmental conference — backed up by a permanent secretariat stationed in Belfast — between the London and Dublin governments which will jointly run Northern Ireland. The executive power stays exclusively in British hands, but the political control of the executive is normally to reside in the inter-governmental conference.

The Anglo-Irish agreement is an international treaty registered with the UN, according to which the British government obligates itself to run Northern Ireland in agreement with the 26 County government and when disagreements emerge earnestly to seek agreement and a common policy.

Britain declared itself to have to opposition to a united Ireland if the Six County majority wanted it, and promised to legislate for a united Ireland if a Six County majority decided for it; the 26 County government promised to respect the separateness of the Six Counties so long as a majority there wanted to be separate.

It is power-sharing between Dublin and London. Because it proved impossible to establish power-sharing between Northern Ireland political forces in Belfast, the two governments have established a radically new framework over their heads.

If some form of mutually acceptable power-sharing in Belfast is agreed, then most of the powers of the inter-governmental conference will devolve to the Belfast government.

The agreement contrasts with the Sunningdale agreement of 1973 in not being dependent on any local agreement. Sunningdale started with agreement for power-sharing in Belfast, and proposed to build upwards on this towards a Council of Ireland. Hillsborough starts with a Council of Britain and Ireland and wants to build downwards. The Sunningdale agreement was vulnerable to the Orange general strike of 1974 because that strike could bring down the power-sharing executive. No local action in Northern Ireland can bring down Hillsborough, if the nerves of the London and Dublin governments hold.

The Orangists are — from their own point of view — quite right that the

Anglo-Irish agreement marks a big new involvement of the 26 Counties in the administration of Northern Ireland.

2. Why the Hillsborough agreement

Northern Ireland broke down as a political entity in August 1969. Catholic revolt against their second-class citizenship and a Protestant backlash against the Catholics led to the British Army being put on the streets to stop sectarian fighting (after over 500 Catholic families had been burned out in Belfast).

That Northern Ireland had indeed broken down was recognised by Britain in March 1972 when the IRA military campaign forced Britain to abolish the Protestant-controlled Belfast home-rule government. Britain attempted radically to restructure Northern Ireland politics by replacing majority — Protestant-sectarian — rule with institutionalised power-sharing.

It won the majority of Catholics to support the power-sharing, but only a minority of Protestants. When an executive based on the Catholic majority and a Protestant minority was nevertheless set up, a powerful Orange general strike brought it down in May 1974.

After that British direct rule became semi-permanent and the chief task Britain set itself was to defeat the insurgent Catholic IRA. But the IRA remained in the field and after ten Republicans died on hunger strike in 1981 the Republican movement achieved a degree of Catholic political support that convinced the rulers of London and Dublin that things were getting out of their control.

The Southern Irish nationalist parties and the Six County constitutional nationalist party, the SDLP — which had been the mainstay of the power-sharing experiment in 1974 — spent a year in the 'New Ireland Forum' discussing constitutional rearrangements in Ireland that would end the IRA's revolt and bring about reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant.

They prepared a number of possible options, all of which were immediately rejected by Mrs Thatcher. One of these options was joint rule in the Six Counties by Dublin and London, London representing the Protestants and Dublin the Catholics. That was rejected in 1984 by Mrs Thatcher.

But after over a year of negotiations, what the London and Dublin governments came up with was a variant of power-sharing — political power-sharing while the executive power remained in British hands. As well as that, it is proposed to create a strong Dublin-Westminster joint parliamentary committee, thus drawing Britain and the 26 Counties closer together than they have been since Southern Ireland seceded

from the UK in 1922. The Anglo-Irish agreement is thus a framework within which British/Irish collaboration can evolve and develop on a closer level than for 65 years — if it holds.

3. The Anglo-Irish agreement and a united Ireland

Most of the left, following the Republicans, denounces the Anglo-Irish deal for 'copper-fastening' partition. But this is false. Every 26 County government since 1922 has in fact recognised partition and some have declared that there can be no united Ireland without the consent of a sizeable section of the Six County Protestants.

The Anglo-Irish deal would only copper-fasten partition if there was some way of removing partition that the deal hinders. There is no way to remove partition unless the Northern Ireland majority wants it. To try to conquer the Protestants would not bring Irish unity. Almost certainly it would lead to sectarian civil war and bloody repartition. In fact the alternative to the Anglo Irish agreement was the status quo — i.e. deepening integration with the UK under prolonged direct rule.

If the Anglo-Irish agreement works against a united Ireland, it will be by way of the embitterment it has caused.

4. Socialists and the Anglo-Irish deal

Anything that would bring about reconciliation between the two communities in Northern Ireland, and thus create the preconditions for working class unity, should be welcomed by socialists. But the Anglo-Irish agreement does nothing of the sort.

While alienating the Protestants more profoundly than they have ever been alienated from Britain, it gives little to the Catholics other than the participation of the Dublin government as their champion. It is a profoundly undemocratic agreement, made over the heads of all the people in the Six Counties and resulting in structures that fall a great deal short of democracy.

The Anglo-Irish agreement does not solve the problem that has to be solved in Ireland; it exacerbates and inflames it.

The basic problem is that there is a natural Irish minority — the Protestants — which, according to democratic norms, would have every right to special treatment as a minority by way of having autonomy in its own heartland areas. But Ireland as a whole was ruled by Britain, and the minority — partly for reasons of protecting itself against the Irish majority — allied with a powerful section of the British ruling class against the Irish majority. As a result of that alliance Ireland was partitioned, with the Protestants having their own home-rule state within which there was a Catholic minority bigger as a proportion of the Protestant state's population than the Protestants of all Ireland would have been in a united Ireland.

The Catholic minority in the North

**IRELAND:
The
Socialist
Answer**

was some 35%, and they were in the majority in a sizeable part of the Six Counties — so they were felt to be a permanent threat to the Protestant majority. They were treated as second-class citizens, discriminated against and rigorously excluded from any say in ruling the Six Counties, even in local government where they were the local majority (eg. Derry).

They suffered for decades and then revolted with a strength and determination that the British government has found impossible to quell.

The problem is to find a democratic framework which (a) takes account of the legitimate concerns of the two communities in Northern Ireland, of the wish of the Protestants not to be incorporated as an oppressed majority in a Catholic-majority Ireland as well as the wish of the Six County Catholics not to be an artificial minority in the Six County state, and, (b) allows for reconciliation and the development of normal class politics in Ireland.

That framework can only be a federal united Ireland — in which the minority areas will have autonomy — combined with the close link between Ireland and Britain acceptable to the Irish majority.

The fundamental criticism of the Anglo-Irish agreement from this point of view is that though it provokes the Orangeists about as much as a united Ireland would, it does not move any way towards providing a workable democratic framework.

The majority of the Orange population want a restoration of Orange majority rule. They will resist anything short of that and anything other than it. There would be resistance to any attempt to create a democratic federal structure. But resistance to structures that actually do take account of Orange interests could eventually dissipate. By contrast the Anglo-Irish agreement does not offer structures within which the Orangeists can be reconciled.

It puts them forever under the joint ultimate control of Britain and Britain's inter-governmental conference partner, the Fenian government which they believe schemes and plots endlessly to take out the Six Counties and incorporate its people as a helpless minority in the Catholic state.

5. Prospects

The Orangeists seemed almost unanimous in their opposition to the Anglo-Irish agreement. Their unity has begun to shatter in face of the intransigence of Thatcher.

As a section of the Orangeists go all the way to outright illegality, the process of differentiation within the Orange ranks will accelerate. Already the Official Unionist Party leader James Molyneux has said 'Never again' after the violence of the 3 March strike, and the OUP officially kept away from the illegal demonstration at Portadown on 31 March.

A two-way separation will occur. A section of the Orange politicians will

probably try to reach accommodation with Britain, as Paisley and Molyneux did in late February. Others will go into militarist occupation. The creation of a 'Protestant IRA' is most likely — an organisation striking at the South.

The majority of Catholics have been shown in opinion polls to favour the Hillsborough agreement, and the SDLP has been boosted at the expense of Sinn Fein. But the Catholics have in practical terms gained little, and the Orange backlash now threatens them with the sort of campaign of sectarian assassinations that swept across Northern Ireland between 1972 and 1976. The consequence of the Orange backlash in the Catholic community is that the IRA will be boosted as a defensive force.

In the months ahead the prospect is for a series of fierce clashes between the police and the Army and the Orange militants. The RUC will probably be eroded by the campaign against them in the Orange community (though this may provoke a revulsion which will be part of the process of polarisation in the Protestant community). In any case the RUC could hardly cope with the level of conflict that looms in the marching season ahead.

Therefore the British Army will be drawn more and more into 'police' work against the Protestants. The experience in 1969 and after when the Army did police work in the Catholic areas where the RUC had ceased to be acceptable suggests that this will further poison the already very bitter relations between the British government and the Protestant community.

The chances that Britain, caught between the two communities, will just pull out, are probably very small. The consequences, including the very likely spread of Catholic/Protestant conflict to British cities like Glasgow, are far too grave for any British withdrawal in response to the new situation. Britain will try to tough it out.

6. The Republicans

If any benefit to the Catholics can be claimed from the Anglo-Irish agreement, then to the Republicans' military campaign belongs the credit.

The tragedy is that the cost of that campaign in terms of the deepening of the ancient gulf between the two communities is immense — and it has not yet been paid.

The revolt of the Catholics was a just revolt, its channelling into this sort of military campaign the product of the domination of a particular political tradition. Today the dilemma of the IRA lies in this, that if the military campaign were to stop then the pressure for change would stop; and if it goes on now then it is the pyromaniacal activity of pouring petrol on a fire that may anyway be uncontrollable.

The temptation to 'detonate the Protestants' and use them against Thatcher must be great. After all it was the Protestants who wrecked power-sharing in 1974. But no good can come of it.

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

Out of the sectarian civil war that is a clear possibility in this situation can come neither a united, nor a democratic, and still less a socialist Ireland.

7. Civil war

The fundamental threat in Northern Ireland is of sectarian civil war — which would lead to a bloody repartition, complete and fix the division in the Irish people for perpetuity, and probably boost clericalist reaction on both sides of the new border. Compared with that, the carnival of reaction which accompanied the 1920 partition would seem mild and moderate.

One consequence of the vicious Irish nationalism so widespread on what might be called the organisationally inchoate but ideologically Mandeliste left is that the danger of sectarian civil war is not properly appreciated. It filters through the ideological spectacles as 'the socialist revolution', 'the permanent revolution', or as a little local difficulty which the good guys would win.

We must fight this irresponsible and light-minded attitude. In the period ahead it will otherwise isolate the left from serious and sober-minded labour movement militants who will rightly recoil from the prospect of sectarian civil war.

8. The left

Most of the so-called Marxist left is politically subservient to Sinn Fein. They relate to Ireland through romantic populist spectacles which allow them to avoid seeing the horrifying spectre of communal civil war that looms behind events there.

In their reaction to the Anglo-Irish agreement most of the left have surpassed themselves, focusing on the alleged surrender of Irish sovereignty and failing almost entirely to see anything new. The writers and readers of publications like *Socialist Action* and *Labour and Ireland* must be mightily surprised by the recent events in Northern Ireland.

On Ireland the left needs urgently to rearm itself with working-class Marxist politics.

Troops Out

The single isolated slogan 'Troops Out' has come to be the mark of a sizeable part of the left in the last decade. It has become something of a fetish, isolated from the rest of a socialist or democratic programme on

20 Years

Ireland.

We are for Irish self-determination, therefore for troops out. But *Socialist Organiser* has repeatedly criticised the slogan-mongering use of troops out as if it were a self-sufficient programme. Right now troops out without a political settlement means — for a certainty — sectarian civil war and reparation. It means not self-determination of the Irish people as a whole, but the dog-eat-dog destruction of any chance of unity of the Irish people as a whole.

Troops out is not a political programme, but only part of one — and it can be part of more than programme. Plain troops out tomorrow means sectarian civil war — troops out with a political settlement means something radically different.

We are in favour of British withdrawal but as part of a political solution which actually allows Irish self-determination: and that can only mean a solution which leads to some form of federal Ireland within which Protestant and Catholics will not, immediately Britain goes, have to set about determining how they relate to each other by sectarian civil war, perhaps even on the pattern of Lebanon.

We do not say 'we support troops out only after a federal Ireland has been agreed'; we say 'a serious movement for troops out among the Irish working class, let alone the British working class, can only be built as part of a programme for actually realising Irish self-determination.' In a sense this is conditional support for British withdrawal — but withdrawal is not a fetish. And it does not mean that we take any responsibility for the British troops. They buttress an untenable status quo and they serve British governments — Labour and Tory alike — which over the last 17 years (and now again with the Anglo-Irish agreement) could not have acted very differently if they had been deliberately trying to make sectarian civil war inevitable.

As the Orange mobilisation develops, sections of the soft left will probably start supporting British troops against the Orangists or advocating their use. We do not back the Orange bigots, but we do not back the troops either. We remain the party of irreconcilable opposition.

10. The Catholics

The Northern Ireland Catholics remain the chief victims of partition. They are likely now to be victims of reactivated Orange murder gangs. In the event of sectarian civil war they will be

the most vulnerable, especially in Belfast.

While we advocate a democratic solution to the Protestant Catholic conflict, and reconciliation and working class unity as a basic immediate policy for Northern Ireland, in face of sectarian conflict we must stand with and defend the Catholics.

11. Socialism

The unspeakably bitter spectacle of the workers who live in the run-down Shankhill area of Belfast in murderous conflict with their Catholic working-class neighbours in the run-down Falls area sums up what capitalism, British rule and the activities of the Irish

bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians have done to Ireland.

The massive 25% unemployment rate among people who often lack the means of life above the bare necessities is a further indictment of that system.

The Irish working class, Protestant and Catholic alike, needs socialism — that the workers should join together and take power from the capitalists.

We do not counterpose future socialism to the just struggle of the Catholics now, nor pretend that a divided Irish working class can miraculously make a sudden leap from the terrible reality of today to socialism.

But we need socialism, and a movement that fights for socialism as well as for a democratic solution to the Catholic/Protestant conflict.

Socialist Organiser debates Sinn Fein

Daisy Mules — Sinn Fein

It is very useful for us to get a feedback of what the British left are thinking about Ireland and about the issues that concern us in Ireland — and obviously also concern you in Britain.

First, I'll deal with the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Judging by the actions it has triggered, this agreement signed by Thatcher and Fitzgerald on November 15, 1985, could be deemed a momentous step forward. However, our attitude is that it is nothing of the sort.

Acclaimed internationally, approved by Irish establishment parties, and opposed with growing vehemence by the Northern Unionists — surely the Agreement cannot be that bad? But it is.

The Agreement is a setback for all socialist forces in Ireland, and their supporters in Britain who have been working for Britain's disengagement from Ireland, and for Ireland's right to self-determination as a whole.

The Agreement does not offer anything new. In it, Dublin recognises that the Northern Unionists have a right to veto Irish unification. And the two governments announced the setting up of an inter-government conference in which Dublin's role will be consultative, and which will look at ways of improving Dublin's cooperation on the security front, as well as reforming the Northern state, prior to devolving some sort of power back to an acceptable administration there.

So what exactly are the objectives of the Agreement? One of its prime aims has been widely and accurately described as the defeat of the IRA. It proposes to achieve this by a mixture of reforms in the North, supposed to erode the support of the IRA and Sinn Fein, and increased collaboration by armed forces both sides of the border.

This was seen specifically when Dublin ratified the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. Until then, only four other EEC countries, including Britain, had done so.

This will further reduce the already frayed right to political asylum in the 26 Counties. At the moment, as some of you are probably aware, there are great moves going on to renegotiate the extradition treaty between the United States and Britain.

The Ulster Defence Regiment remains — whose members have time and time again been found guilty of assassinating innocent Catholics. Only recently, four UDR men were convicted although they were not given a specific sentence.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary, whose members have been involved in 'shoot-to-kill' tactics against nationalists, beating in detention centres and recruiting of paid perjurers for mass trials, will not be disbanded. Non-jury courts are here to stay despite mentioning that they might do away with them in the future.

The so-called reforms which we were

**IRELAND:
The
Socialist
Answer**

told to expect have not happened — except one. I am not sure if you are aware of this, but in the North, if you were born in the 26 Counties, you have no right to vote in any election apart from a Westminster election. The one concession that has now been given to us is that those who were born in the 26 Counties can now vote in any election in the Six Counties.

It is intended that these reforms be presented as a result of the agreement, and a victory for the SDLP, in the hope of wooing nationalist voters away from Sinn Fein.

However, the thinking that underlines this part of the agreement is that the IRA and Sinn Fein thrive on the misery of Northern nationalists — as is often said by the SDLP, the Catholic hierarchy and the Dublin politicians. Unemployment breeds violence, they say. Hence the recently agreed US financial input, and the possible financial back-up from the EEC which will presumably be used to create jobs. Sinn Fein says that unemployment breeds demoralisation, apathy, ill-health, alcoholism, domestic violence against women and children, drug taking. But it does not breed political activism.

Far from thriving on misery and deprivation, Sinn Fein works hard through its advice centres, trades unions and local campaigns to help bring about change.

In the meantime, while Dublin waits for an auspicious moment to pass some reforms, the Dublin government will be expected to carry out its duties, as spelt out by the agreement. Consulted about the North, it will share responsibility, but not power, with Britain. And it will be expected to shoulder a great burden of the massive military and judicial operations aimed at containing republican resistance.

Already the cost to the tax-payer in the 26 Counties of maintaining partition is £53 per person per year, while the equivalent tax to the British tax-payer is a mere £9.

Thatcher has the Dublin government over a barrel. She has got the Fitzgerald government to accept responsibility for part of Ireland over which it has no power. She will make them pay for every crumb of reform that may be brought about by increasing their collaboration with the British Army, the RUC and the Northern Judiciary. Furthermore, the Unionist veto has been recognised in a legally-binding agreement.

Why then has this Dublin government, which calls itself a nationalist government, signed such an agreement? Indeed, why is it supported by Northern middle-class nationalists like the SDLP leader John Hume?

The first reason is that they feel threatened by the emergence of Sinn Fein as a credible political force since the 1981 H-Block hunger strike. The second is that the constitutional parties in the 26 Counties have no urgent desire to achieve Ireland's reunification, and self-determination, as this would radically change the balance of power and the

conservative nature of Irish politics.

As for the SDLP being the 'respectable' middle-class nationalist alternative to the IRA, it will always be assured of a little place in a devolved administration at Stormont. In fact, our belief is that if it had not been that the Assembly was dissolved there recently, the SDLP were actually preparing to re-enter Stormont.

Why are the Unionists opposed to the Agreement? After all, the aim is defeating the IRA, and it plans to enroll Dublin's help for that purpose.

At the turn of the century, Unionism represented economic power and industrial wealth. But since the Second World War, especially, things have changed. The linen mills are no more. Most of the heavy engineering industry has been nationalised and needs large subsidies to survive. Unionists with their naked bigotry and their decaying economic muscle are no longer an important partner for Britain's policy in Ireland. They are, however, a sizeable minority in Ireland as a whole, and heavily armed.

Unionists presently feel jilted by Britain, deliberately kept away from the London-Dublin talks. They were told on November 15 that Dublin's opinion would be listened to before London decides how to administer the Six Counties. That was enough.

Assurances that Britain's sovereignty over the North was intact were not listened to. Reaffirmation of their constitutional guarantee was ignored.

Any move in the direction of Dublin was seen by the Unionists, not so much as a slippery slope to a united Ireland, but rather as yet another sign that their bargaining power was on the wane. But the days of unchallenged Unionist rule in the Six Counties are no more.

In 1986 the interests of Unionism are narrower than the interests of Britain. Unionism today is not so much about the Union as about partition. It is partition that has secured a permanent Unionist majority in the Northern State for 64 years. It is partition which has kept the benefits of industrial development away from nationalist areas, with the result that many Unionist areas of the North enjoy a lower unemployment rate than in Britain, while in nationalist areas 40-80% unemployed are not uncommon.

It is those marginal privileges that working class Unionists want to preserve, more than the Union Jack or the link with Britain.

The idea of an independent Ulster comes from working class loyalist groups, like the paramilitary UDA. Even repatriation has been mentioned — anything rather than lose this corner of Ireland where they rule supreme.

Furthermore, unemployment and other figures show that 14 years of British direct rule have failed to erode Unionist domination significantly. Only Irish independence could hope to end Unionist power.

All this talk of reconciling the two traditions — Unionist and Nationalist

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

traditions — within the Six Counties, is therefore a smokescreen. Unionism and nationalism are two diametrically opposed political viewpoints. And the people who hold this can only be reconciled within partition if one side, or both, abandons its ground.

It is obvious that both London and the Dublin government will be expecting Northern nationalists once again to knuckle under. Crumbs of reforms will be thrown at them. Republican 'troublemakers' will be interned, proscribed, censored or otherwise disposed of. And British interests in keeping Ireland under control will have suffered not one bit.

This is why the present British government is trying to stabilise the Six Counties, and normalise North/South relations, while establishing closer links with Dublin. Like its predecessors in 1971 and 1973 it would prefer a 32 County statelet, rather than the present powderkeg. For this it must seduce the Irish nationalist middle class, appease the Unionist monster, and eliminate Republican resistance. The first objective has been reached. To achieve the second it hopes to deliver the third: the defeat of the IRA and Sinn Fein.

But Unionist opposition is not just caused by IRA actions and Sinn Fein's presence in the councils. It is mostly about losing their supremacy. This could be Thatcher's first miscalculation. The second is about defeating Republican resistance.

Whatever its future holds, it remains that this Agreement is a step backwards for Irish nationalists — and for all those that want to see the development of a free, independent, united and socialist Ireland. Socialists and progressive people everywhere must oppose the Agreement as another attempt by Britain to consolidate its hold on Ireland under cover of peace and reconciliation.

They should not be confused by the support given by the Irish nationalist middle class to the Unionist veto.

In the final analysis, Britain's colonial stranglehold on Ireland can only be broken by a process of decolonisation. Peace and stability can only be established within a framework of Irish national self-determination.

The inherent weakness of the Hillsborough process is that it is not geared to these objectives. On the contrary, it is geared towards thwarting the attainment of these objectives. And for this reason, as for many of the other imponderables, it is doomed in the long-term to failure.