

The Republicans

socialism, it is something to be created by the Catholic community, not by the working class, Catholic and Protestant alike.

Socialism is equated with anti-imperialism, and anti-imperialism with the military struggle in the North. Sectarianism is identified exclusively as a creation of Britain — and the answer to sectarianism, therefore, is once again the military struggle in the North.

The Protestant workers are seen not in social, class, terms, but almost exclusively as a catspaw of Britain and as the embodiment of sectarianism.

By a process of redefining terms, therefore, non-sectarian socialism is equated (for immediate activity) with a narrow nationalist militarism. Recklessness in relation to the Protestant workers is justified in terms of political intransigence against Loyalism.

Thus the 'socialist' element becomes a matter of sentiments, aspirations, and faith in the nationalist struggle somehow 'growing over' into socialism. The immediate practice is nationalist — or in fact, by means of defining the Catholics as 'the nationalist community', Catholic communist.

Yet there can be no genuine socialist revolution in Ireland without the participation of the decisive core of the Protestant working class.

The idea of socialism created by a military elite, no matter how much support it has in the Catholic community and no matter how good the back-up services it creates by community politics, is inconsistent with working-class self-liberation.

At the end of its 1985 Ard Fheis, Sinn Fein voted, against its leadership's opposition, for a woman's right to choose on abortion. The 1986 Ard Fheis promptly reversed the vote. Sinn Fein remains a Catholic party, both at leadership level and at the level of its rank and file and broad support.

Why Sinn Fein cannot lead a struggle for socialism

Because of the fact that they make the 'armed struggle' in the North central, the Provos have been unable to win much support in the South. A programme which makes the forcible inclusion of the Northern Protestants into a united Ireland its centrepiece does not and cannot attract the mass of Southern workers. It cannot and does

not address their most important concerns.

But the Provos' politics would still be Catholic communalism even if they got mass support in the South.

It is not only undesirable, but impossible, to press the Northern Protestants into a united Ireland by Catholic military force; a serious drive to do it could only end in civil war and bitter repartition. The Provos' current politics are thus unable even to win a free united Ireland, let alone socialism.

Central to Irish politics is the fact that between a quarter and a fifth of the people of Ireland are the main obstacles to Irish unity. But in Sinn Fein politics,

the history of British crimes against Ireland, and the reality of British army brutality in Northern Ireland now, are used to obscure and muddle this — to present the problem of the Protestants as merely a sub-section of the problem of British occupation.

This means evading the nature of the basic problem which any organisation which wants to forge Irish unity — let alone Irish working-class unity — must face and solve.

Irish workers who really want to fight for a socialist Ireland will have to reject and go beyond the politics of Sinn Fein, and take their stand on working-class Marxist socialism.

Stop the military campaign!

An open letter to Gerry Adams, November 1987

You have said publicly that you deeply regret the slaughter and havoc caused by the Provisional IRA bomb in Enniskillen last Sunday.

I'm sure you do. Not only have you slaughtered and maimed innocent Irish people attending a religious service, you have also dealt a grievous blow to the cause you want to serve — Irish unity.

But you have neither acknowledged nor apologised for the Catholic sectarian side of Sunday's massacre — though that is the side of it which will be most in the minds of Ireland's Protestant community, and especially of Protestants in areas of Northern Ireland where Catholics are in the majority, as they are in Fermanagh.

This carnage brings out clearly how sharply what you do contradicts what you want to achieve. The constitutional nationalist John Hume was right to describe the Enniskillen slaughter as a 'sectarian provocation'. You say you want a united Ireland — and you commit a sectarian atrocity like this against the community without whose consent there will never be a united Ireland!

Whatever you want to do or think you do, Mr Adams, your movement does not work for a united Ireland. The entire logic of your military campaign points not towards a united Ireland but towards bloody repartition by way of sectarian civil war — a war made up of such acts as Enniskillen.

Even if you gain your immediate objective, British withdrawal, through your military campaign, that will only be the first step towards the tragedy of sectarian civil war — out of which can only

come repartition.

Irish nationalists like Eamonn De Valera abjured violence against the Protestants as a means of uniting Ireland because they knew that the most it could achieve would be to shift the border east and north, incorporating some of the Six Counties territory into the Republic. The 16 year long war which your movement has waged proves that they were right on that. What was wrong about De Valera's approach was his social and political programme, not the lack of gunfire.

Doing what is necessary to defend Catholic communities in Northern Ireland against attacks by Orange bigots or British forces is one thing. Trying to unite Ireland by guerrilla war against the British Army — and, in fact, against the Northern Ireland Protestant community — is another.

It is a war you cannot win. It is a misconceived war. Its objective — Irish unity — cannot be won by war. It can only be won if the consent of the Irish community is won.

Your war is premised on radical misunderstandings and self-hypnotising ideological lies.

It is not 'British imperialism' that keeps Ireland divided. Fundamentally, it is the refusal of the Protestant-Unionist Irish minority, who are the majority in north-east Ulster, to accept the status of a permanent minority in a Catholic state.

A campaign aimed at re-uniting Ireland by military force is thus inevitably a war directed more against the Protestant community than against the

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British state.

An effective Republican movement should be fought against sectarianism in all forms, advocating a federal united Ireland with regional autonomy for the Protestant-majority area, and striving to unite workers in struggles for jobs, wages and conditions. It should ruthlessly reject all green-nationalist rhetoric and all provocative actions that divide workers. We cannot unite Ireland without uniting Irish people. James Connolly was right when he wrote: "Ireland without her people means nothing to me."

Yours is a war waged in the name of the Irish people, but actually based only on the Six Counties Catholic minority — and even on a minority of that minority. Your support in the rest of Ireland is minuscule.

Your chances of winning over the Northern Ireland majority are nil. In fact you don't try. Everything your movement has done over many years is proof that you have no interest in trying. Both your political aims — a unitary all-Ireland state, which would inevitably be Catholic-dominated — and your methods — a guerrilla war against the British state and against the Protestant community, are based on one community only.

A war against the Protestant community? Yes, Mr Adams, there is no other way to describe it, whether we are talking about what happened in Enniskillen or about the killing of Protestant workers earlier in 1987 after they had been labelled as "military targets" for doing jobs somehow related to maintaining the army or police.

The slaughter of the innocents in Enniskillen will convince many of Sinn Fein's erstwhile supporters that the Provisional IRA's war has landed your movement — and all of Northern Ireland's society — in a bloody dead-

end. It should convince the socialists within Sinn Fein that the military campaign needs to be called off now.

No good can come of this campaign. There is nothing revolutionary about militarism-on-principle. Even if this campaign should succeed in forcing the British to withdraw — and it won't do that — then it will not unite Ireland, but bloodily redivide it...forever.

Enough is enough!

John O'Mahony
Editor, Socialist Organiser.

Provos and Protestants

This excerpt from Gerry Adams' speech to the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis (conference) in January 1989 represents the furthest the new Sinn Fein has gone in recognising the need to reach out to the Protestants. It raises many of the right questions; but gives no answers.

Since our last Ard Fheis I had a series of discussions with a number of Northern Protestants.

These discussions crystallised for me the need for Republicans to understand the perceptions and fears of this section of our citizens.

The majority of Northern Protestants locked into their support for unionism and imperialism see the demand for Irish national independence as a demand for a creation of a Catholic state and an end to their Protestant identity. Many of them wrongly conclude when Republicans call for a British withdrawal that we include them in that withdrawal scenario. Their fears are fed by the reactionary utterances and antics of sectarian politicians.

Those perceptions, though foreign to Irish Republicans, are held by many Northern Protestants. They represent a barrier

which we must consistently try to break down. When we consider the gulf of pain and hate and the years of physical separation that exists between ourselves and the Northern Protestant population this is a formidable task. Yet it is one to which we must remain committed.

It may be crystal clear to Republicans that the Protestant population have got it wrong about our political intentions but this sincere conviction is not sufficient. Their perceptions are equally sincere and we have to see ourselves from their point of view. The Republican analysis is correct in seeing the defeat of imperialism as the key to peace and justice on this island.

Many Republicans who understand this and who understand the centrality of imperialism to the conflict underestimate or have yet to consider the trauma that will be experienced by the Protestant population when the union with Britain is severed. How can we lessen that trauma? Or indeed, can it be lessened at all? Our education as Republicans will be incomplete until we have developed an understanding of all this.

Our search for peace has to rise above the consequences of imperialist rule if the post-partition independent Ireland is indeed to be based on the unity of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter.



Some economic facts

NORTH AND SOUTH TODAY

The South is now slightly more industrialised than the North. This is a big change from the previous pattern.

	South	North
Value added: % industrial	37%	35%
Industrial (excluding utilities) % of civilian employment	29%	27%

(EEC statistics, 1984.)

GDP per head is on average almost exactly the same in the South as in the North. Social benefits are also on similar levels — 1982 figures (from EEC) for social benefits per head of total population were UK £1110, 26 Counties £1040.

Major differences:
 • Southern industry is much more modern. Electronics accounts for over a third of manufacturing exports. Metals and engineering account for 38% of value added, office and data processing equipment for 19% (*Financial Times* 8.7.86). Chemicals are now the next major sector.

In the North, 40% of jobs in manufacturing disappeared between 1979 and the mid-'80s. The remaining industry is generally old-fashioned and declining.

• The South is still more rural and agricultural. In the North a huge role is played by public service employment — 36% of total employment (*Irish Times* 26.8.85). With even higher unemployment than the South (around 20 per cent), over half the North's population is directly dependent on the British state for income (wage or benefit) (*Irish Times* 26.8.85).

Net subsidy from Britain to Northern Ireland is £1.5 billion a year, about 30% of Northern Ireland's total income.

So: economically the North is a drain on British capitalism, which has however been able to establish profitable relations with the independent South.

The condition of the working class is worse in the North than in the South — Northern Ireland is the worse-off region in the EEC after Calabria in Southern Italy.

Protestant workers in the North are slightly better off than Catholic workers — Catholic unemployment is two and a half times Protestant unemployment. The Protestant workers may, therefore, possibly have

a slightly higher average living standard than Southern workers; but to see the Protestant workers as the pampered pets of imperialism and the Southern workers as 'Third World' people makes no sense.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE 26 COUNTIES SINCE 1958

	1960-1	Mid-80s
% of working population		
in agriculture	35%	17%
Urbanisation	46%	56%
Manufacturing % of exports	12%	68%
% of exports to UK	72%	35%
% of exports to other EEC countries	11%	34%

(Figures from World Bank and Oxford Economic Atlas of the World. Earlier figure for manufacturing exports is 1955.)

Ireland is now an advanced capitalist country. It is on roughly the same level, as measured by National Income per head, as Southern Europe. In terms of the introduction of modern capitalist relations in the countryside, it has long been in advance of Southern Europe, since the landlords were bought out after 1903.

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80% of the 26 Counties' manufacturing exports are produced by foreign-owned companies, which also employ almost half the country's manufacturing workers — and repatriate 60% of their profits. The 26 Counties also has a huge foreign debt.

But two other facts should be born in mind before this feature is cited as proof that the 26 Counties are still a 'semi-colony'.

Most of the foreign-owned companies are not from the country which the 26 Counties would presumably be a semi-colony of — Britain. Of about 900 foreign-owned companies, over 300 are US-owned, 130 West German, and only 200 or so UK-owned.

And Ireland has been exporting capital since the 1870s. By 1914 Ireland was a creditor country and Irish capitalists had total investments abroad of £150 million (L M Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660*). A survey in 1964 found that Ireland had the fourth highest level of investment income from abroad, per head of population, in the world! Its inflow of investment income was \$104 million, its outflow \$67 million (*Britain's Invisible Earnings*, 1967, chapter on *World Comparison of Invisibles*). Only in more recent years has the inflow of capital to Ireland made it a clear debtor country.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the time of Partition there was a stark contrast between the North and the South. In 1911 Ulster had 48% of all Ireland's industrial workers, and Belfast

alone, 21% (Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: the Orange State*). The North exported manufactured goods internationally (a large proportion to the US); the South, agricultural produce, mainly to Britain.

17th century: The bulk of Ireland's land seized and given to English or Anglo-Irish landlords or farmers. Plans to clear the native Irish from large areas and replace them by settlers generally fail; the only large area when English and Scots settlers become the majority is in the north-east, and that is as much due to free migration as government policy.

Semi-feudal land relations, but under the 'Ulster Custom' Protestant tenants in the north-east have more security and a property right on improvements they make to the land. Attempts to clear peasants off land to make room for sheep and cattle. Big outflow of cash to absentee English landlords.

18th century: The 'Protestant Ascendancy' established, with 'Penal Laws' against Catholics. Growth of linen industry, especially in the north-east, as a rural cottage industry. Weaver-peasants do deal with merchant capitalists rather than wage-work for industrial capitalists.

After 1800 (*Act of Union*): decline of industry in South, rise of Belfast industry (linen, shipbuilding, engineering). Before 1800 most of the linen trade from the north-east had gone through Dublin merchants; after 1800 it goes through Belfast. By 1835 Belfast is a busier port than Dublin. There is no integrated all-Ireland economy.

After Famine of 1840s: massive depopulation. — people replaced by sheep and cattle.

After 1885, and especially after *Wyndham Land Act of 1903*: Britain government decides to 'buy out' landlords to pacify Irish countryside. A 'bourgeois revolution' on the land — from above.

1920-1: Partition. Southern Ireland gains partial independence from Britain, which over the following decades it makes complete. Northern Ireland remains attached to Britain, but with home rule as a 'Protestant state for a Protestant people'.

After 1932: 26 Counties shifts to economic nationalism. 'Economic War' between 26 Counties and Britain. Industrial employment expands by 50% between 1931 and 1938, but at a cost.

From mid-1950s: With the old nationalist policy leading to stagnation, the 26 Counties reopens its economy to the world market. Meanwhile Northern Ireland's industries, founded in the 19th century, are declining.

1972: Ireland joins the EEC. Major benefits for Irish farmers.

Ireland today is highly integrated into the international economy. The 26 Counties exports over 50 per cent of what it produces, and is increasingly tied in to the EEC. Any economic policy today seeking to cut Ireland off from the rest of the world economy is utopian and reactionary.

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A Catholic state for a Catholic people?

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"If the old Protestant Stormont Parliament, with the full backing of the Protestant Church, but against the united will of the Roman Catholic Church and people, had forced through Parliament a law dealing with some complex moral issue, do you not think that Stormont would have been accused of the vilest form of sectarianism by acting against the united wishes of the Roman Catholic community and by insensitivity to Roman Catholic opinion".

Victor Griffin, dean of St Patrick's, Dublin.

The abortion referendum in the 26 Counties in 1983 led some before the poll to talk of a 'new partition of Ireland'. The result showed they were right.

In a very low turn-out (54%) there was a two-to-one majority to insert into the constitution a ban on abortion (which is already illegal).

For the sponsors of the referendum it was, however, a very qualified victory. Only one third of the electorate voted yes.

There was a sharp division between Dublin — where half voted no — and the rest of the country. And the senior partner in the coalition government, Fine Gael, was heavily divided.

The youth of Fine Gael campaigned openly for a no vote. At the end prime minister Garret Fitzgerald came out, timidly, for 'no'.

The Labour Party, junior partner in the coalition, was divided too: half the deputies for yes, half for no.

The supporters of the amendment pulled out all the stops in their campaign, and they had a lot in their favour. The South of Ireland has long been a Catholic, conservative society, where the priests are a tremendous social power. It has been in the grip of a savagely repressive sexual puritanism since the mid-19th century Famine.

Though the society has changed massively in the last 25 years, with industrialisation and urbanisation, the forces of Catholicism and conservatism are still strong. Over 80% of the people still go to Mass regularly.

Those at the top of the Catholic hierarchy made pseudo-liberal statements that people should vote according to their consciences. The lower clergy made every pulpit a political platform for the 'Pro-Life' campaign.

The mass circulation press and the provincial press said vote yes. Behind them they had the Catholic teaching that

an embryo has a soul from the beginning, and abortion is therefore infanticide.

Most of the opponents of the amendment are against abortion. Some — like Fitzgerald — argued against the amendment on the grounds that, because of ambiguous wording, it could lead to legalised abortion.

Behind the argument about wording, there was also a more important argument about the role of the Catholic Church in Irish society.

The amendment was tailored to fit Catholic social teaching. The Protestant churches in the South opposed the amendment. They are against abortion, but not as unconditionally or obsessively as the Catholics. Victor Griffin, Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin, put it like this:

"There can be no true Republicanism without equality of recognition, and this implies the toleration of different views and practices in relation to certain moral issues within the framework of an agreed public morality. Such moral issues should be the affair, not of a Republican state, but of the particular Churches, each having the right to exercise its own particular moral discipline and none having the right to enforce theirs on others.

"At present we must admit, however reluctantly, there is no strong commitment in this state to any kind of united Ireland which would involve accommodating the Protestant minority point of view".

A massive blow has been dealt to the pretence that the Southern political parties really want a united Ireland.

The Irish people is divided. Whatever the historical and economic roots, and political/economic underpinnings, this expresses itself in the consciousness of the Catholic and Protestant people as a matter of religion — to which are attach-

ed ideas about liberty of conscience, and of the relationship of the individual and his or her conscience to Church and State.

On every count the referendum has been an attempt at a Catholic triumphalist assertion of the dominance of one side over the other. On 7 September 1983 the Irish constitution was explicitly identified with the Catholic church. The nationalist cause was identified with the Catholic cause.

Fianna Fail identified completely with the amendment campaign. After a 20-minute (!) meeting of its parliamentary deputies, Fianna Fail decided to vote yes, and the party's discipline did the rest. Yet Fianna Fail is The Republican Party — and the party which the 'left Republican' IRSP, for example, has supported in elections.

In the North, the SDLP majority was for a yes vote.

Symbolically, even Sean MacBride, founder of Amnesty, son of the 1916 martyr, and Chief of Staff of the IRA in the late '30s, voted yes. It was a repeat of his stance in 1951, when the Fine Gael/Labour Party/Clann na Poblachta government buckled under the pressure of the Catholic hierarchy's opposition to a health scheme for 'Mother and Child'. MacBride was then the leader of Clann na Poblachta, and forced the Clann na Poblachta Minister of Health, Noel Browne, to resign.

All this is very relevant to the dispute about 'federalism' in a united Ireland. The fact is that the forces that dominate Southern Irish politics ignored the protests of the Protestants (and Jews). The two-thirds who voted no or refused to rally to the priests are a basis of hope for the future, but the yes vote won.

A fight to ensure the rights of the Protestant minority must be part of the fight for a united Ireland.

What do the Irish people want?

An opinion poll in February 1983 asked people in Northern Ireland what political solution they wanted.

Among Catholics 31 per cent wanted a home-rule government for Northern Ireland with power-sharing, 25 per cent wanted a united Ireland.

47 per cent of Protestants wanted integration of Northern Ireland with Britain; 17 per cent power-sharing, and 14% Protestant majority rule.

No solution commanded a majority in either community. The only one that had sizeable support in both communities was

power-sharing — a formula that evidently sounds attractive, but which has proved impossible to establish despite repeated efforts by British governments over 16 years. 56% of Protestants and 84% of Catholics said they agreed with the 'principle' of power-sharing.

These figures register a political impasse. Hand talk about 'supporting the struggle of the Irish people for a united Ireland' looks very simplistic indeed when you consider that only 18% of the population of Northern Ireland and only 25% of Catholics (fewer than vote Sinn Féin) give 'united Ireland' as their favoured solution. (Fortnight, April 1983)

The Workers' Party

At the conference (Ard Fheis) where the former Official Republican movement changed its name to The Workers' Party, a Dublin solicitor, Pat McCartan, argued in favour of the name change that it would allow "professional people and tradesmen" to feel at home with the party.

He wasn't making a music-hall joke. He knew what he was talking about.

The dropping of the Republican name followed a sweeping repudiation of traditional revolutionary republican attitudes, and the Workers' Party name has not stopped the party voting for Haughey as prime minister and guardedly supporting both the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Tories' previous 'Prior initiative' for 'do-it-yourself' devolution in Northern Ireland.

The WP calls for the building of a workers' party on an all-Ireland basis. It claims to be recruiting Protestant workers in the North. It bitterly denounces the contention of "the Fianna Fail/SDLP/Provo axis" that Northern Ireland has failed as a political entity. Its solution to the Northern conflict is "peace, work, democracy and class politics".

Now influence has frequently been gained by Labour and socialist parties in Northern Ireland on the shallow ground of trade-union and economic issues, but it has never withstood the disruptive power of communal and sectarian, not to speak of republican, politics.

The leaders of the Workers' Party should have learned this the hard way in the late '60s, when their supposedly unifying civil rights campaign aroused the Catholics but alienated the Protestants. After leading Catholics to take a first step of calling for civil rights, the second step had to be to tackle the root reason why they had been deprived of civil rights — partition.

The Workers' Party's solution to the communal divisions in the North is essentially to bury its head in the sand and pretend that this time, despite all previous experience, working class unity can be built on a basis of economic issues and socialist propaganda.

In the meantime its approach is to be a responsible and 'constructive' force in

mainstream politics, putting forward reasonable and balanced proposals on all the issues of the day — within the parameters of the existing system.

Involvement in the Southern political establishment on this basis is already ravaging the Workers' Party's socialist credentials. Its commitment to the existing structures will inevitably mire it completely in the bog of bourgeois, anti-working-class politics.

When they called themselves Republicans, they used to talk about completing the Irish bourgeois revolution (national independence) as the necessary first stage, before starting on the second stage — the struggle for socialism. They are still trapped in that Stalinist stages theory of revolution.

Now they denounce the Irish bourgeoisie for not having industrialised the country. They say that the immediate task, the task that has to be accomplished before starting a direct struggle for socialism, is the 'Irish industrial revolution'. And their role in that task is reformist pressure and Parliamentary deals.

There is a precedent. In the 1940s, a regroupment of Republicans, seeking a way out of the blind alley politics of physical force on principle and abstention from the existing political structures, formed a party called Clann Na Poblachta, led by Sean MacBride, a Chief of Staff of the IRA in the 1930s.

It was a mildly reformist organisation.

It played a big role in bourgeois politics for a while, holding the balance in the Dail. In 1948 it joined a Fine Gael/Labour coalition government.

When the Catholic Bishops vetoed the establishment of free medical care for pregnant women, mothers and infants, the party repudiated its own Minister of Health, Dr Noel Browne. The coalition collapsed and Clann na Poblachta rapidly fell apart.

History never repeats itself exactly, but the Workers' Party has all the ingredients of a slightly more radical version of Clann na Poblachta.

The additional feature of the Workers' Party is the Stalinist influence. The Workers' Party supported, for example, General Jaruzelski's military coup and the suppression of the workers' movement in Poland.

Workers' Party leader Sean Garland declared: "It was clear that the Polish armed forces had to take action to stop it sliding into anarchy and total chaos and ultimately ending in the hands of imperialism". No-one should accuse these defenders of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of forgetting about imperialism!

But quite a few of the Workers' Party's rank and file activists probably think that it is a real working class alternative to traditional Irish nationalist politics. Whether some of them can go on to break with it and help build a real revolutionary socialist working class party must still be an open question.

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

The Militant tendency argues that bread-and-butter trade union unity and a drive to form a Labour Party in Northern Ireland show the way to a socialist united Ireland. Why are they wrong?

From a working class point of view, the basic problem about the Six County state is that in that state framework,

working class unity, developed on a trade union level, has always shattered at any political test. So long as the 'constitutional question' remains at the heart of political life there, it always will shatter on the rooted communal antagonism between Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists.

Trade union unity is possible in struggles like the NHS dispute of 1982. But

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there is no way that such unity can open the way to solid political working class unity in the sectarian Six County entity. Even spectacular examples of Protestant/Catholic working class unity have proved to be mere episodes.

For example, the well known 'outdoor relief' fight in 1932, unity in working class resistance to cuts in social security payments was possible because both Catholics and Protestants were hit impartially. Barricades went up in the Protestant Shankill Road and in the Catholic Falls Road. Activists went from the Falls to man Shankill barricades, and from the Shankill to defend the Falls against the police. (Some on both sides were influenced by the Irish Stalinists.)

Within weeks of this spectacular unity, no less spectacular sectarian rioting had been fomented. There are other examples, both before and after Partition.

The experience of the various incarnations of the Northern Ireland Labour Party runs in parallel to this. Today a very tiny Unionist rump, the NILP has at various times grown to a significant size.

It attempted to confine itself to bread-and-butter working class issues, that is, to generalised trade unionism, bargaining in the working class interest on the level of provincial and 'United Kingdom' society. It evaded, hedged and compromised on the issues that divide Northern Ireland's workers.

In the 1940s, for example, NILP speakers on the Falls Road campaigned under the nationalist tricolour. In the 'mixed' centre of Belfast they campaigned under the Red Flag; and party leader Harry Midgley campaigned on the Shankill under the Union Jack (he ended up a Unionist).

Such a balancing act could not get far. Sectarian suspicions soon disrupted the party and scattered its forces.

To reject Militant's view of a Labour Party as the cure-all is not to say that socialists should not work in a Labour Party if it existed. Serious work was done, for example, in the late '60s in the Derry Labour Party, which became cen-

tral to the civil rights struggle.

Even after it split, Eamonn McCann could get 8,000 votes on a revolutionary socialist platform in the mid-1970 election.

Yet McCann's experience, too, underlines the basic point that simply trying to generalise from trade unionism within the Six County framework is no solution. The Derry Labour Party left wing tended to ignore the national question, and was bypassed by the eruption of the Republican movement. Their forces scattered, too: some went to the Officials and then to the IRSP, one or two to Militant.

Many well-intentioned tricks have been tried to unite Northern Ireland workers. In 1907 Jim Larkin had united Protestant and Catholic workers on a trade union level. When it came to the marching and rioting season, on July 12, he tried to preserve the unity by organising his own united Orange/Catholic working class parade around the walls of Derry.

The Protestant workers, said Larkin, would march in honour of King William who secured their liberty in the 'Glorious Revolution'. The Catholics would march to honour the Pope, who at that time had taken the Papal States into the international alliance against France of which William was part!

They had a successful, and unique, parade around Derry. Within weeks sectarian rioting had shattered working class unity.

The inescapable conclusion from history is that general political unity cannot be created on the basis of the trade union ('economic') unity; and that unity in trade union action is not the harbinger of a stable class unity.

Many on the left go on from this basic fact to a general dismissal of any concern for working class unity. The national question, they seem to say, supersedes everything else in Northern Ireland.

The trade union struggle is of little importance. The Protestant working class — that is, the big majority of the work-

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ing class — is of no concern of ours. The struggle for socialism will develop out of the revolt of the oppressed Catholics, even though that revolt fails to mobilise, and indeed antagonises, the Protestant workers.

We concern ourselves only with the 'anti-imperialist' military campaign of organisations representing perhaps half the Catholic third of the Six County population. Only when that campaign is victorious will questions like working class unity be important.

That is the mirror-image of the Militant caricature of socialist and Marxist politics.

Militant's approach to Ireland relates only **selectively** and **arbitrarily** to the issues, processes and struggles in Ireland. It **pretends** that trade union battles involving workers from both communities already amount to, or by way of being generalised into a new Northern Ireland Labour Party can be made into, working class political unity.

It goes from this to general socialist propaganda about nationalising the entire economy. Its version of 'socialism' is bureaucratic, statist, and somewhat 1890s-Fabian. As James Connolly put it, "State ownership and control is not necessarily socialist — if it were, then the army and the navy, the police, the judges, the gaolers, the informers and the hangmen would all be socialist functionaries as they are all state officials... To the cry of the middle class reformers, 'Make this or that the property of the government', we reply — 'yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property'."

But even if Militant's conception of socialism were more revolutionary, there would still be a problem. In between sub-political industrial issues, and the political maximum, the socialist revolution, they leave a great void. The void is what's wrong with their politics, not that they advocate and want to build working class inter-communal unity at any level possible, and not that they make propaganda for socialism.

A working class political party that can really unite the working class in Ireland, specifically in Northern Ireland, will have to be one that can honestly answer all the problems the key sections of the working class face — and in the first place the 'constitutional question'. Militant's answer is the same as its answer to every living struggle in Britain or anywhere else — **propaganda** for 'socialism, the only road', combined

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with a routinist and politically accommodationist approach to the basic struggles of the working class and the labour movement. It is a vicious circle: there can be no socialism without the working class, but the working class is deeply divided. To offer 'socialism' as the solution to this division is simply to restate the problem, not to give an answer.

From this general approach has flowed Militant's record over the last 20 years. Initially it opposed the deployment of British troops on the streets after August 1969, and sympathised with the Catholics. It quickly veered (by 1970 or 1971) to an attitude of condemning the 'sectionalism' and then the 'terrorism' of the Catholics. It was like its attitude to the struggles of blacks, women, gays and others in Britain itself: the Catholic revolt in Northern Ireland was a complication which it wished would go away.

Ever since they have not supported the just revolt of the Catholics. Within the labour movement they are among the most vicious opponents of any attempt to get a calm discussion of the

Republicans, their struggle and their objectives. Militant peddles its own curials and nostrums, the famous 'trade union defence force', for example.

A good idea — for a different society. The workforce is heavily stratified as a result of sectarian job preference. This affects the unions, where unity has been possible only on minimal trade union questions and by avoiding politics. The unions reflect the society they exist in. The Protestant UDA is (or at least the mass, 50,000 strong, UDA of 1972 was) the nearest thing to a trade union militia that Northern Ireland will see this side of a revolutionary change of working class consciousness.

Essentially Militant lacks the democratic programme which has to be part of filling the void between trade union minimalism and the socialist revolution. It relates to the political world around it by pretending that the communal divide can be ignored, and that the national question can be pushed aside. It pretends that socialism can be the cure for divisions whose healing is

the precondition for socialism in Ireland.

Militant's policy is a recipe for building a sect in Northern Ireland. It has as little chance of uniting the Six County working class as the previous Labour Party minimalists had. No political formation that does not have in its programme a democratic solution to the Irish national question and to the communal antagonisms in Northern Ireland will even begin to play a positive role in Irish politics.

The best democratic programme is that of a federal united Ireland with as much autonomy for the Protestant community as is compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people. An all-Ireland revolutionary movement must be built which integrates this with the direct work of educating and organising the labour movement to fight for workers' power, and which links up with the workers' movement internationally, especially in Britain and in Europe, on the programme of the United States of Europe.

Militant's record on Ireland

Militant has a record on Ireland unique on the British left. Since 1968 it has argued for working-class unity and immediate socialism as the answer to the conflicts in Northern Ireland. Support for working class unity is not unique to Militant, nor is the idea that socialism is desirable in Ireland, as everywhere else. What is unique is that Militant says: 'unity now and socialism now', and counterposes more or less general and timeless propaganda for workers' unity and socialism to all partial struggles and particularly to the struggles of the oppressed Catholic minority.

To the problem of communal divisions in the working class, its answer is that the workers should be united. To the problem that the different working-class communities are mobilised around national and communal issues, its answer is that they should be mobilised for socialism. Militant steadfastly refuses to address the situation more concretely or seriously.

For 20 years Militant has stubbornly refused to acknowledge the bitter facts about Northern Ireland.

The unions in Northern Ireland organise a workforce much of which has long been selected on a basis of sectarian job preference for Protestants, and therefore the sectarian

divisions are internalised in the unions. Irrelevant, says Militant. Chronic working class division inevitably paralyses the trade unions, and they would split who open if they tried to engage in politics in conditions where different sections of their members give radically different answers to the question of Northern Ireland's relationship to Britain and the South of Ireland. Not so, says Militant: the trade unions have Catholic and Protestant members, and therefore they are non-sectarian. They can rise above the little political questions that convulse the Six Counties and lead a united Protestant/Catholic working class to socialism.

The workers of the two communities actively or passively support 'their own' paramilitary organisations. No, says Militant. The paramilitaries are tiny grouplets suspended in mid-air. Anyway, if the labour movement were to create a workers' defence force, the workers would support that.

For 15 years Northern Ireland has been torn apart by what the Catholics see as 'the national question'. What answer do Marxists offer to this problem in its peculiar Irish context? Socialism is the only answer, says Militant.

An internationalist would say that the problem in Ireland is a problem of how the Irish minority — the Protestants — can relate to the majority without becoming an oppressed group; and that this basic problem has been staled up and made septic by the interactions of the Protestant minority with Britain, because they have 'solved' the Irish minority problem by imprisoning within the murderously narrow and artificial Six County state a Catholic minority proportionately bigger than the Protestants would be in a united Ireland. A Marxist internationalist would at least ask the question: does not the Bolshevik teaching that wherever such problems exist we advocate a radical democratic solution, involving maximum autonomy for oppressed or potentially oppressed communities, na-

tions, fragments of nations, or national minorities, apply? What does Militant say to the question: is socialism the only answer — and anything less is treason to socialism?

Now the elitist armed groups like the Provisional IRA and INLA, much denounced by Militant, can talk about socialism irrespective of the state of the working class, and even against the majority of the working class, without being untrue to themselves. But for Marxists to talk about a socialist solution as the immediate answer to chronic and acute communal division within the working class, whose unity is an irreplaceable precondition for socialism, is nonsense.

For 16 years Militant has advocated 'solutions' for Northern Ireland that just could not happen in the circumstances. It has proposed ideas that are not a guide to any meaningful action, but only consoling phrases, ideological booze. The answer, it says, to the paralysis of the trade unions, is for them immediately to act for socialism and to create a workers' defence force. Until 1974 it advocated the same solution: the formation of the Unionist Northern Ireland Labour Party. Such proposals cannot conceivably bring the 'socialism now' which is supposed to be the 'only solution'; nor can they conceivably assist in doing what can possibly be done in a positive way towards workers' unity and socialism.

Militant's key ideas, summarised above, have been a broad fixed framework within which, over 16 years, it has had a rich and varied series of notions and speculations. In 1969, it speculated, fantastically, about the prospects for a pioneering socialist society in...the Six Counties unit! 'If the demands [minimum wage; equal pay; crash building programme; take over big building companies; improved social services] are pressed home in action, it can be linked up to the demand for the taking over of the big monopolies and the establishment of a democratic socialist society — which would

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This July 1972 article was unique in Militant, in that it recognised that there might be some problems in the trade unions: "We still believe that this [workers' defence force] could be realised, even at this eleventh hour, despite the relative animosity which has also now [1] affected the trade unions..."

Mostly Militant has stuck stubbornly to the 'trade union defence force' demand, as though the communal clashes against which defence must be organised were in a different world from the trade unions. But occasionally it makes strange sallies. Though venting its implacable hostility to the Provisional IRA, Militant could nevertheless in 1972 make a strange 'call' on the Catholic leaders — including the Provisionals — to create a party of labour!

"Much of the onus for [building the party of Labour] is today on those in the vanguard of the struggle, the leaders of the Catholic workers. Were these people to direct their energies towards the organised labour movement they could pave the way for united action with their Protestant fellow workers." (Militant no.118, August 1972)

It should be added that the leader of the Northern Ireland Labour Party component in

this ecumenical front, David Bleakley, had been in the government that brought in interment against Catholics — and only against Catholics — in August 1971!

At the same time Militant speculated about the processes going on in the UDA that would produce class consciousness. "The development of the UDA with its veneer of class consciousness shows that Protestants are well aware of their class position..." (ibid)

And during the Orange general strike of 1974 Militant opposed any action by the Labour government to break the reactionary — and even racist — strike, thus telling British workers that the strike was entitled to be treated as a working class action, if not quite a proper or normal one.

In 1980-81 Militant opposed the granting of political status to the Republican hunger strikers.

These are just a few examples of the nonsense that has grown up, at various turning points, under the umbrella of Militant's general ideas. There are many others that could be cited.

This is the record of a tendency that, on Northern Ireland, has not dealt in real politics. It has made socialist propaganda, either very abstract propaganda (but presented as if it is an immediate answer to specific issues) or propaganda in which the socialist message is tied tightly to absurd but supposedly practical proposals.

An example of the latter is its often-repeated proposal for a conference of Northern Ireland trade unions and others to launch a Party of Labour which could nationalise the commanding heights of the economy, etc., and thereby solve every problem, including sectarian divisions in the working class. Think about it. Trade unionists in Northern Ireland vote Tory-Unionist or Catholic-Nationalist. A truly representative conference of the trade unions would be at a more backward stage than were the trade unions which founded the British Labour Party in 1900 — and they were at best Liberal. Such a party in Northern Ireland would need time to evolve and develop. But what would Militant do such a conference, faced with the trade unions as they are, far from socialism?

Would it do what the sectarian British Marxists, the SDF, did in 1901, that is, move a resolution with a full socialist programme and walk out when it was rejected (as it inevitably would be)? Perhaps not. But then it would accept that the conference could not produce the miracle results claimed for it. In fact it is a certainty that such a conference could not lead to anything like Militant's 'socialist solution' in the short or medium term.

Militant, in essence, has had no policy for Ireland — only timeless propaganda, linked to more or less bizarre and, in the circumstances, impossible 'practical' proposals. What distinguishes Militant on Ireland is not the desire for workers' unity and socialism, which it shares with all socialists, but its stubborn refusal to face the facts about Northern Ireland. For working class Marxists, the facts, not fantasies and wishes, are the necessary starting point.

have immediate repercussions in the South, in Britain, and internationally..." (Militant, May 1969)

Then, responding to the slaughter of 14 Catholics by the British Army in January 1972, Militant waxed eloquent about...organising the British Army for socialism. "A campaign of individual assassinations...of the British soldiers can only provide excuse for further repression...Also it can only reinforce the hostility of the ordinary soldier to the Catholic population...[Rank and file] soldiers could be appealed to on a class basis and won away from the army brass, if a clear socialist alternative was given to them..." (Militant, 4 February 1972)

Faced with what looked like civil war in mid-'72, Peter Taaffe wrote this: "But, given the failure of the trade union leadership to initiate a trade union defence force, every working class area must have the right to defend itself." (Militant no.113, July 1972)

You're on your own boys! In fact, this was to give the seal of Militant's approval to the UDA. It should be remembered that it was the Catholics who were likely to need defending if it came to all-out war.



Our record on Ireland

Socialist Organiser traces its attitude on Ireland back to the small group of socialists who produced the journal *An Solas/Workers Republic* in 1966-7, under the umbrella of the Irish Workers Group.

We believed that traditional Republicanism was not and could not be a consistently anti-imperialist force; that it was, by its ideas, goals and methods a petty-bourgeois movement; that its petty-bourgeois nationalism was a barrier to working-class unity; that its 'little Irelandism' cut in the opposite direction to the interests of the Irish working class.

We believed — in the mid-'60s — that the adoption of a socialist coloration and the brand name 'Connolly socialism' by that movement was not progressive but confusing, and could only produce a populist mish-mash like the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party.

"...the IRA is just not revolutionary in relation to the objective needs of the only possible Irish Revolution.

"The same is no less true if 'left' slogans are grafted onto the old base, and a nominal 'For Connolly's Workers' Republic' pinned to the masthead. Such talk of a socialist programme, a Bolshevik party, a workers' republic, demands a proper appreciation of the relationship between the party and the working class...It demands a sharply critical approach to the traditional republican conceptions of revolutionary activity. Otherwise these slogans combined with a largely military idea of the struggle against imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie, will not produce a revolutionary Marxist party, but an abortion similar to the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia, against which the Bolsheviks fought bitterly."

We believed that though there was national oppression — especially and directly against the Northern Ireland Catholics — this was in part the product of a split in the Irish bourgeoisie, and not simply a matter of 'British-occupied Ireland'.

"A division of the Irish bourgeoisie, originating in economic differences, led to a split which was then manipulated by British imperialism, according to its practice of divide and rule. The Northern section, having a measure of

political autonomy, kept close links with this imperialism; the Southern section being dominated according to the logic of modern imperialism [i.e. economic weight within more or less free market relations].

"In maintaining their closer links with Britain, the Northern capitalists were aided by British troops, who also assist in holding sufficient people to make the state viable. Despite this, talk of 'British-occupied Ireland' obscures the real identity of the garrison in Ireland — the Northern Ireland bourgeoisie."

(Editorial of Irish Militant, paper of the IWG, February 1967. Irish Militant was loosely associated with the British Militant until about 1966 and thereafter had no connection with it.)

Basing ourselves on Lenin's 'Imperialism' and such documents of the Communist International as the 'Theses on the National and Colonial Question' (1920) we believed that the economic domination over Ireland by Britain and other great powers could not be eliminated except by the reorganisation of the world economy through the international socialist revolution.

"The IWG stands against the divided Irish bourgeoisie, Green, Orange and Green-White-and-Orange, and for the revolutionary unity of the workers of all Ireland in a struggle for state power.

"We stand for the revolutionary combat against imperialism and national oppression in every form, whether that of garrison-imperialism, neo-colonialism, or the glaring economic domination of the small nations by the super-powers which is inevitable where the capitalist world market remains as the sole regulator of relationships. But we denounce those who, in the name of 'Republicanism' and 'anti-imperialism', attempt to subordinate the working class to any section of the bourgeoisie, and who counterpose a defunct petty-bourgeois nationalist narrow-mindedness to the socialist struggle of the workers for power. National unity will be achieved, if not by the coming together of the Irish capitalist class under the auspices of the British imperialist state and the capitalist drive towards West European federation, then as an incidental in the proletarian revolution.

"The possibility of any other revolutionary reunification is long since past. The only revolutionary Republicanism is the international socialist Republicanism of the proletariat."

(Towards an Irish October, preamble to the constitution of the IWG.)

We thought that the nationalist (left and right) focus on gaining 'real' independence was both meaningless for the 26 Counties and confusing from the point of view of the Irish working class.

We rejected economic nationalism as being no more than the discarded and discredited former economic policy of the 26 County bourgeoisie (1932-58). It was a reactionary petty-bourgeois programme counterposed to the necessary — and, in so far as it was developing and augmenting the Irish working class, progressive — integration of Ireland into the existing world economic system. It was a backward-looking utopia, counterposed to the economic programme of the Irish working class, for whom there could be no purely Irish solution.

"The one serious progressive act of imperialism and Irish capitalism has been the creation of an Irish proletariat capable of putting an end to capitalism's futile existence, and capable, as part of a world revolutionary class, of realising the age-old dream of the people of Ireland for freedom. The best traditions of the old, bourgeois, Republicanism have passed to the socialist working class, the only class in Ireland today capable of transforming society and the subordinate relation with Great Britain — the only unconditionally revolutionary class. The only genuine liberation of Ireland will be from the inexorable — uncontrolled — pressures of international capitalism. All the essential goals of all the past defeated and deflated struggles of the Irish people over the centuries against oppression and for freedom of development and freedom from exploitation, can now only be realised in a Republic of the working people, as part of the Socialist United States of Europe and the world."

(Towards an Irish October.)

We naturally rejected the Menshevik-Stalinist notion that there had to be a two-stage revolution in Ireland — first 'the Republic' (independence) and then 'the workers' Republic'. We rejected the hybrid 'populist Republicanism' — a fusion of the Stalinist two-stage theory with 'native' Republicans who were left-wing but put 'the national question' first — represented historically by Paedar O'Donnell, George Gilmore and the Republican Congress of the 1930s, and in the mid-'60s by the 'left' of the Republican movement, the future Official IRA and Workers' Party.

We rejected the kitsch 'Trotskyist' response to the stages theories and the populists — the reflex invocation of 'Permanent Revolution'. The job was not to match texts with texts, ours against theirs, permanent revolution against stages theories, as in a card game. Instead we had to analyse reality concretely. On this approach, the conclusion was inescapable.

Ireland had had its 'bourgeois revolution'. In the North, bourgeois relations had been established by extension from

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Britain after its bourgeois revolution in the 17th century. In the South, land reform was organised 'from above' by Britain in the late 19th/early 20th century, under pressure of a mass revolt. The national division was not pre-capitalist. The basic problem was the split bourgeoisie and the varying links of its different parts with the British ruling class; and the fact that the bourgeoisie, North and South of the Border, could command the allegiance of the working class.

Ireland was a relatively advanced bourgeois country, integrated into European capitalism, albeit as a weaker capitalism. That the 26 Counties was really independent politically — independent to the degree possible under capitalist world market economic relations — was shown by its neutrality in World War II.

"The division [in the Irish bourgeoisie] prevented the accomplishment of one of the major tasks of the traditional bourgeois revolution — national unification. However, if history and the relationship to Britain make the two statelets peculiarly deformed, they are nonetheless undeniably bourgeois, as a glance at the social organisation and relations of production makes obvious...

"We who fight for the workers' international Republic know that the present Irish capitalists are the only ones we will get. Calling them traitors is useless — they are not traitors to their class, as the only sphere in which real loyalty, as opposed to demagogic talk of loyalty, counts..."

[*Editorial, Irish Militant, February 1967.*] Irish Militant was not linked politically to the existing Militant group.]

THE WORKERS REPUBLIC

No. 19
FORMERLY AN SOLAS



'An Solas', Irish Marxist journal of the 1960s

WORKERS FIGHT

ALDERSHOT TRAGEDY



Our political forerunners refused to join the outcry against 'terrorism' in the early '70s

After 1968

The massive revolt of the Catholics in 1969 and after, and then the rapid growth of a new IRA after 1970, forced us to reconsider and modify these assessments, and to respond politically to new facts.

Many Irish socialists responded initially with a 'socialism-is-the-only-answer' message, neglecting the national question. We did not. On the contrary, we were the first on the left to point to the nationalist logic of the civil rights struggle, and to argue for raising the national question boldly.

But we did not forget what we had learned. We did not go in for romanticism and flights of fantasy, in the style of Socialist Action — then IMG — or Briefing, about the Catholic revolt being the socialist revolution. Even when the Catholic revolt was apparently most successful, we pointed to its limitations.

"The Northern Ireland Catholics fight in isolation, in the most unfavourable conditions imaginable. The rearguard of the Irish fight for national freedom, they are betrayed and abandoned by the 'leaders' of the Irish nation, and are simultaneously cut off from the allies who would make an advance on a socialist basis possible — the Orange majority of the Northern Ireland working class..."

(*Workers' Fight, July 23 1972*)

We defined what was happening as primarily a Catholic revolt with a limited potential of solving the national question. It was the revolt of the Six County Catholics, not a rebirth of the 1918 all-Ireland nationalist upsurge. It was limited as an anti-imperialist movement

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because it was confined to the Six Counties, and because of the split working class there. Nevertheless, it had to be supported.

When the Catholic civil rights agitation got underway in 1968-9, we supported it, but criticised it on three counts.

(1) Logically the central issue was the national question, and events would inexorably force it to the fore. The basic underlying civil right the Catholics lacked was the right to national self-determination. We said in early 1969 and long before the Republican movement, some of whose members were leading the civil rights struggles, said it: the goal has to be to smash the Six County state.¹

(2) At the same time, because of its petty-bourgeois, Stalinist and populist-Republican leadership, the entire civil rights movement was needlessly divisive. The demands one man (sic) one house, one man one job, one man one vote, were inevitably seen by Protestants as a desire to re-divide and share what little there was. The issue could have been dynamically and progressively posed in these (transitional demand) terms: build more houses, thus creating more jobs, etc., etc.

(3) We criticised the civil rights movement (including such of its leaders as the then IS/SWP supporters in Northern Ireland, like Michael Farrell, who has since become a political satellite of the Provisionals) for political confusion on the national question and on the need to try to unite the working class around the Catholic movement (if they wanted to play down the national question in the cause of uniting the working class in the Six Counties around civil rights and socialist propaganda). We also criticised them for organising provocative marches and demonstrations in Protestant areas which were helping stoke up a sectarian explosion.

When the Provisional IRA launched its military offensive in 1971, we critically supported their right to fight against the British government in that way. We defended it outspokenly in the British labour movement.

We did not use our previous assessment of the improbability of a revolutionary reunification of Ireland short of a socialist revolution to draw sectarian and abstentionist conclusions about the actual struggle that had erupted. But we did not forget that assessment. In fact the 20 years of war have in their own way established very clearly the truth of that assessment.

We maintained a critical political stance towards the IRA. In the early

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'70s, when such a thing existed, we reprinted Irish socialist criticisms of the IRA from 'People's Democracy' and from the 'League for a Workers' Republic'. We never had other than derision and scorn for the wild Third-Worldist fantasies and incredible 'permanent revolution' scenarios which the IMG — the closest group to us in its political responses in the early '70s — spun around the Catholic revolt.

At best we believed that the Catholic and IRA revolt would force Britain and the Irish bourgeoisie into a radical reorganisation of the Irish state system. Of course it did: Protestant Stormont was abolished in March 1972 and direct rule substituted. In November 1985 Dublin and London signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, giving Dublin a share in the political decision-making in Northern Ireland.

After 1972

Since 1972, despite many important twists and turns, the basic facts of the situation have remained unchanged, in stalemate. The British Army cannot defeat the IRA; the Catholics cannot defeat the combined forces of the British Army and the Protestants; the British government is not sufficiently energetic or sufficiently driven, to impose a rearrangement on the Protestants.

In the 26 Counties, there have been some impressive one-off waves of solidarity action — after Bloody Sunday in 1972, and during the hunger strikes. But the basic facts of the political set-up have not changed. The two Green Turf parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, remain dominant — as they were in the '60s. The Irish Labour Party remains a tail of Fine Gael — as it was in the '60s.

Thus the Irish national struggle remains essentially confined to 10% of the Irish nation — the Northern Catholics. That does not detract from the justice of their fight. It does limit its prospects.

It is possible that the situation in the North may be transformed by something from outside it — for example, by a revolutionary upsurge of working class struggle in the South, creating a new basis for workers' unity in the North. Socialists should do all we can to help such a possibility emerge. But we cannot guarantee it at all; and in the meantime we have to formulate ideas showing some way forward from the situation as it is now, not as we hope it will be some-

day.

We advocated a federal arrangement within Ireland from as early as 1969, but the importance of this element in our politics has increased with the 20 year stalemate.

In this and other aspects of the Irish-British question we differ from other Marxists. Militant has long refused to campaign in any way for British troops out of Ireland, instead they use general propaganda about the need for socialism to evade the issue. That is contemptible. But the attitude of those many on the left who argue that 'troops out' and 'the defeat of British imperialism' are the crux of the Irish question, and all else is pettifoggery and probably 'capitulation to imperialism', is empty phrasemongering and in its own way just as shameful as Militant's evasions.

'Troops out' is a good slogan. But it is not sufficient. In most national liberation struggles we can say simply: the imperialist power should get out and hand over to the local nationalist movement. There is no all-Ireland nationalist movement. There is a nationalist movement of the Northern Catholics (10% of the population of the island) which is regarded with bitter hostility by the Northern Protestants (20%) and sporadic sympathy, but some alarm, by the Southern Catholics (70%). The situation is further complicated by the political split in the 10% of Ireland's people who are the half million Catholics in the Six Counties. According to election results, only about 1 in 3 of Northern Ireland's Catholics positively support the Provisional IRA or Sinn Féin.

Lenin argued:

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to 'sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism' without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of how Social Democracy will solve the problem when it assumes 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."

Nowhere is this more true than on the slogan 'Troops out of Ireland'. In early 1969 some of us argued against IS/SWP's almost-exclusive concentration on 'Troops out' (until the troops went on the streets, in August 1969, and IS dropped the call). We criticised the implied illusion that the Catholic civil rights movement would organically 'grow over' into socialism; and argued for propaganda for the workers' republic.

In the mid-'70s we argued against the notion (put forward by the IMG — now divided into Socialist Action and Briefing — and others) that a mass movement could be built in Britain on the single slogan, 'Troops out'.

We use 'Troops out' as one means of focusing the issue in Britain. It is not a full programme, though some on the left sometimes talk and act as if it is. Even the Provisionals, more serious than their

less thoughtful British admirers, put precise demands on the way Britain should get out.

If British troops quit Ireland tomorrow, it is quite likely that there would be a sectarian civil war, leading to repatriation.

Self-determination? Unify Ireland? The Provisionals are not strong enough to do it. The Northern Protestants are actively hostile to it. The 26 County ruling class has no real wish for it.

The scene would be set for a section of the Protestants to make a drive for the current UDA policy of an 'independent Ulster'. This drive would involve at least a massive crackdown on the Republicans, and, probably, the mass slaughter, rounding-up and driving-out of the Catholics. The Northern Catholics would, naturally, resist violently. Dublin would give some token assistance to the Catholics but do nothing decisive. There would be mass population movements, a repatriation: Ireland would be irrevocably and bitterly split into Orange and Green states. There would be a bloodbath.

The conventional left answer to this, that 'there's already a bloodbath', is no answer. Simmering war with hundreds of casualties is different from all-out war with thousands. Different not only in immediate human terms, but also in terms of the implications for the future possibilities of socialism — i.e. of the Catholic and Protestant workers.

The other answer, 'revolutions always involve bloodshed', is no better. There is no comparison between the revolutionary violence of the working class against its exploiters, or of a subject nation against a conquering army, and the violence of two working-class communities slaughtering each other.

All this does not mean that we should fail to support troops out. That the situation and the prospects now are so bleak is in large part Britain's work.

But it does mean that we should couple the call for troops out with politically adequate proposals for a solution within Ireland — and condemn those who call for troops out without such a proposal as mindless phrasemongers.

The only conceivable solution given the present facts of the situation or anything resembling them is a united Ireland with federalism: i.e. an attempt to negotiate between the sections of the Irish people and to conciliate the Protestants. This would probably involve the recreation of closer British-Irish ties so that the two islands would provide the broader framework within which the intra-Irish conflicts can be resolved.

The conciliation, realistically, would be backed up with a certain element of coercion — i.e. strong indications to the Protestants that prospects for an alternative to a united Ireland were pretty bleak — and would involve some repression against die-hard Protestant groups. But that is different from straight conquest of the Protestants. Logically, conquest is the only alternative to such conciliation, given the Protestants' attitudes. But it is not possible — who

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would conquer them? — and not desirable either, from any working class point of view.

It is possible to evade these issues by wishful thinking. It is possible to fantasise that at the crucial point, the national struggle would magically 'grow over' into socialism, and in some 'dialectical' leap the Protestants would be converted to Republicanism. It is possible to remain blinkered in a sort of inverted British nationalism, saying that 'the defeat of British imperialism' and its effect on the 'balance of world forces' are the things that really matter, and that a positive solution and the avoidance of sectarian civil war within Ireland is a secondary issue.

It is possible to delude oneself with a crude theory of the Protestants as pure pawns of Britain, so that their reactionary ideas would drain away like waters out of a bath once the 'plug' of British troops was pulled out.

But that is not Marxism. It is not serious, honest politics. We will not even be very reliable anti-imperialists if our 'anti-imperialism' is only as strong as our ability to use consoling myths to shield our eyes from uncomfortable facts — until they explode in our faces. Such fantasies and evasions will never allow those socialists who poison themselves with them to make any political contribution to the work of uniting the Irish working class.

The federal proposal might not avert sectarian civil war, either. Whether anything short of a mass socialist movement uniting the workers of both communities (or a big section of them) can end the present impasse in a progressive sense is doubtful. Our programme is to develop that socialist movement; seriously, not by empty schematising about the present nationalist struggle becoming socialist if only it is intensified sufficiently, or national/communal issues fading away if only bread-and-butter trade union issues are emphasised loudly enough.

We should not blunt our socialist programme by false 'realism', by getting tied up in working out 'answers' for the present forces in the situation over which we have no control anyway. But a socialist programme needs to include democratic demands, and a possibility of relating to the political situation now, more concretely than just by saying that a united class movement would be better.

Whether we can have any positive influence on the situation within Ireland depends on there being a material force to fight for such a programme. At present there is no such force. But no force can be gathered without first proclaiming a programme. And no adequate programme can be formulated without first coldly 'saying what it is'.

Our errors

This summary demonstrates, we think, the consistency of the approach that some of us have

had since well before the beginning of the Catholic revolt. Whatever inconsistencies may be found in this or that detail, the fundamental approach is correct.

That does not mean, however, that our politics have been completely adequate. Even in the early '70s, when we put most stress on solidarity with the Catholic revolt, we were critical of the IRA: on the whole, however, we tended to suppress criticism as much as we decently could — and that was too much. The basic principles, views and assessments were correct: but we tended to downplay our own assessments, criticisms and politics in deference to a petty-bourgeois nationalist formation because it was 'leading the struggle against imperialism'. We should not have been so self-effacing.

Footnote

1. We tried to bring the national question to the centre in 1969 by posing it like this: the mainly Catholic areas (about half the land area of Northern Ireland) should secede to the Republic. This was based on the idea that it would make the Northern state unviable.

The belief that secession of the Catholic areas would force the Protestants into a united Ireland was a major reason why the Free State made the deal they did in 1921. Lloyd George promised that a Boundary Commission would in fact redraw the boundaries, thus making Northern Ireland unviable.

In fact secession was anyway the trend in Northern Ireland. Two times before August 1969, Catholic Derry, two miles from the border with the 26 Counties, had set up barricades to keep out Northern Ireland state personnel. In August 1969 Catholic Derry and Catholic West Belfast set up 'free' areas guarded by their own militias. These survived until October 1969.

But in retrospect secession was an artificial way to pose the question of the smashing of the Six County state. In the light of experience since then, there can be no doubt that a Protestant state stripped of the mainly Catholic areas would be viable because the Protestants would make it so.

Some of us were in IS at the time, and our (tentative) proposal about secession was contained in a resolution for IS conference, written in May or June 1969. At the September 1969 IS conference, the leadership used a disloyal misrepresentation of it to distract the discussion. In the meantime they had changed their line from opposition to the British troops to effusive support for them, and we were campaigning against this.

The IS leadership said that we wanted the repartition of Ireland. But our resolution explicitly said the goal should be to smash the Northern Ireland state and establish a united Ireland. Because of the weight of the IS/SWP, this misrepresentation of our position is widespread. It is to be found, for example, in the Penguin book 'The Left in Britain', edited by David Widgery.

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

How not to argue for with- drawal

from back page

'CounterBlasts' series, of which Foot's book is part, as "Britain's finest writers and thinkers...in the best tradition of pamphleteering...new perspectives...voices of dissent...written to question, to surprise, to stir up debate and to change people's minds."

Given the content of the book, only one conclusion can be drawn — that the series' editors know absolutely nothing about Ireland, past or present. Otherwise they would not have published a book containing such wild inaccuracies and bizarre 'surprises'.

One of the 'surprises' discovered by this 'fine writer and thinker' is that Ireland, contrary to popular belief, has 36 counties (p.10). No wonder Foot is described as aiming to 'stir up debate'. Another 'new perspective' is the interchangeability of the terms Home Rule and independence. Foot seems to believe they mean the same thing.

Few other 'fine thinkers' share his belief, indeed many people outside the 'best tradition of pamphleteering' would describe this as a criminal mistake leading to distortion and confusion. It may be that Foot genuinely believes that a Home Rule deal which means an oath of allegiance to a foreign monarchy and no power for the Irish government to raise taxes or an army is the same thing as a treaty of independence. Certainly the Republicans, including the lauded James Connolly, didn't believe any such thing.

But even if Foot is confused about Home Rule, and the 36 counties is a typographical error, the following 'new perspective' surely cannot be a mistake: "In July 1970, before a single shot was fired by the IRA, British troops imposed a curfew in the Catholic Falls Road in Belfast — but there was no equivalent curfew in the Protestant Shankhill."

For the record

The facts, which are presumably available to this 'fine thinker' are these: the curfew was imposed after Protestants attacked a church in the Falls, and three of them were shot dead by the Official IRA. A curfew had been imposed in the Shankhill the previous October. Those facts don't suit Foot's argument so, 'in the best tradition of pamphleteering', he has left them out.

For every accurately recorded fact, there is a piece of nonsense like the above. Confusion abounds. How long have the British been oppressing the Irish? a) six centuries or b) since the 16th century or c) 300 years?

When were the B-Specials abolished? a) 1970, b) 1969, c) they are still going? When is a ban (of the Orange Order) not a ban?

The answers to these and other questions cannot be found in Paul Foot's book — because neither he nor anyone else has bothered to read the manuscript and weed out the inaccuracies, contradictions and other 'surprises'. On average, the reader can find at least one such 'surprise' on each page.

However, this is really nipping; even a 'fine writer' like Foot can make mistakes — though this many is indeed a 'surprise'!

The first 50 odd pages of the book are spent establishing what passes for Irish history in Foot's mind, with a selection of quotations from James Connolly and various Orange and British politicians. Foot has obviously had access to a wealth of material, so it is astonishing that he makes such a bad job of it.

He cannot resist hyping up every atrocity, and consequently distorting most of what he relates, until the distortion ruins what, told baldly and without hype, would be a damning tale of British ruling class plunder and oppression in Ireland.

He uses emotive words like 'colony', 'imperialism' and so on, over and over again, without serious definition. Ireland's history does not need codifying into left jargon, and it particularly does not need confusing in the process. The truth of Ireland's history does not sustain many left prejudices and 'wisdoms', and it should not be distorted so that it does.

The Republican cause espoused by James Connolly loses absolutely nothing from an honest account of history. It can only gain, because by learning from that history we have the potential to move forward.

The final chapter of *Ireland: Why Bri-*

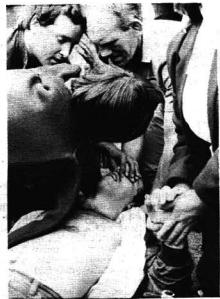
IRELAND: The Socialist Answer

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tain Must Get Out is given over to Foot asking himself four hard questions, and then attempting to answer them — or rather avoiding answering them at all.

The first question concerns the pledges made by Britain to the Protestants that Northern Ireland will remain tied to Britain — "How," asks Foot, "can we break these pledges to them without their agreement?"

He answers the question thus: the British government has broken lots of pledges (not least to the Catholics)



John Downes murdered by RUC

therefore there isn't a problem if another one is broken. The real issue of course is not promises made by British governments — "we" can neither keep nor break those, nor do we identify with or take responsibility for the British state — but the fact that one million Protestants insist they are tied to Britain because they consider themselves British.

The problem is not the pledge — that can be broken at the drop of a hat — but the agreement of the people to whom the pledge was made. All Foot does is say the pledge can be broken, he says nothing about persuading the Protestants to agree to British withdrawal. Does he think that doesn't matter? Apparently.

But he does raise the question of minority rights: "If there is a 'duty' to the majority in the North of Ireland, there is also a 'duty' to the minority." How true. Does it not therefore follow that the Protestants who would constitute a minority in a united Ireland should be considered in the same way as the current Catholic majority in the North? In other words, is Foot, having raised the idea of minority rights, going to apply it consistently to both communities?

He doesn't say, but he makes another attempt to skate around the issue in his next question: The Protestants are a majority in Northern Ireland — how can

any democrat flout the will of a majority? A fair question (though not the really important one). The majority in Northern Ireland don't want to be incorporated into a united Ireland. So what does Foot say?

He says that in a united Ireland the Protestants would not be a majority. In other words if we pretend that Ireland is already united we can safely ignore the wishes of a million of its people and still be democrats. And this from the man who raised the issue of minority rights!

In fact Foot is not in favour of minority rights at all. He simply wishes the current Northern Ireland Catholic minority to become part of an all-Ireland majority, and to hell with the consequences. The question of getting the Protestants to agree to become a minority has now been buried for good, although he does go on to deal with the Protestants' most obvious reason for not agreeing.

Foot asks: if a united Ireland became a reality, would the Protestants lose their religious and cultural freedoms in a Catholic state? His answer to this question is essentially Yes, they would, so it's back to 'minority rights'.

"Protestant fears... have some force. But how best are minority rights protected in any society? Are they best protected by partition, by isolation of the minority in a separate state of their own? Throughout the world, where these problems of racial and religious minorities are repeated over and over again in a thousand different forms, separation and partition of communities on racial or religious lines merely inflames the differences, institutionalises them in politics and in government, and turns one former minority, fearful of persecution, into a persecuting majority, seeking others to discriminate against, to mock, bully and suppress."

Indeed. Once again Foot creates the illusion that he is in favour of minority rights, this time for the Protestants whose right to agree to what happens to them in the future he has just written off, in answering questions one and two.

What solution does he propose therefore to overcome the unwillingness of the Protestants to be incorporated into a Catholic state — given that he appears to be arguing that they may very well finish up a persecuted group?

"Guarantees of religious and individual freedoms are what they say they are: guarantees, which every society owes to its minorities. The way to ensure that the Jewish or black minorities in Britain are safe from persecution is to hold out to them the rights of free citizenship which are available to everyone else; to ensure that there is no privilege afforded to anyone because of their race or religion; and to persecute racial and religious persecutors."

"Wherever such freedoms are upheld, they ensure freedom for religious and racial minorities a thousand times more effectively than do separate states which shore up the political power of gods or skin colour over human beings and create and persecute other minorities."

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Foot is the author of works on racism including *The Rise of Enoch Powell*, so he cannot but know that Jews and blacks in Britain "have the rights of free citizenship" — and that isn't enough! Britain, an essentially secular state, does "not ensure that no privilege is afforded to anyone because of their race...etc." Racism, despite 'guarantees' is rampant.

What then does he expect from a determinedly Catholic state? In fact nothing — he does not expect 'guarantees' to be kept, as he has said in answering his first question. Pledges can be, and consistently are, broken by governments when it suits them.

All the evidence is that pledges and guarantees to religious and racial minorities are broken the world over. Already in Southern Ireland Jews and Protestants have to abide by Catholic laws on divorce, so why should a 'guarantee' have any effect? And the Protestants obviously don't believe in offers of such 'guarantees'. The essence of Foot's argument is simply this: in an ideal world, everything would be ideal.

Foot misses the point. The danger is not that a Catholic united Ireland would ban Protestant churches or Protestant religious opinion. The Catholics in Northern Ireland have always had freedom to practise their religion and indeed to have separate Catholic schools. They have been oppressed socially, as a minority community with a national identity distinct from the majority, not as a religious group. Such oppression is what the Protestants fear from a Catholic united Ireland.

Legal guarantees of individual rights from a state they considered alien could no more satisfy the Protestants than a Bill of Rights could settle the problems of the Catholics in Northern Ireland.

Britain made guarantees to the Northern Ireland Catholics. It didn't keep them. This is Foot's argument in favour of Britain not keeping its pledges to the Protestants.

Why does he therefore assume, as he so blithely does, that Ireland would keep any pledges to the Protestants. He may believe that the Irish state is more honest in its promises than Britain — but the Protestants obviously don't. And that is the point at issue.

Foot has already demonstrated that he believes in majority rule. What he is doing here is covering his back for a British audience, who may be prepared to go along with him for an easy life, and a glib answer. The Southern Ireland state has made vague promises to the Protestants. The Protestants don't want to know. Why? Because they wouldn't be guaranteed while majority rule is the only rule, unless the Protestants have some kind of autonomy.

Foot argues that there are two alternatives — majority rule in a united Ireland, or the status quo, which for him is the only possible expression of Protestant political rights. Actually the Northern Ireland state is not equivalent to Protestant political rights, and the Protestants have good reason to fear a united Ireland with majority rule only.

He won't look at what would really constitute Protestant political rights (local autonomy, a federal system) because a) he doesn't believe in minority rights at all, and b) he thinks Protestant rights means the current Northern Ireland state.

For Foot, as for most of the British left, if he can solve the problem of the Protestants on paper by repeated use of the word 'guarantees' that is enough. Unfortunately for the British left this is not a logic-problem. The current minority is brutally oppressed because, through no fault of its own, it got trapped in an artificial state. Therefore socialists side with that minority. Therefore also we do not advocate the creation of a situation where one oppressed minority is liberated to be replaced by another twice the size.

Socialists also have a duty not to advocate the signing away of the rights of a million people because we can't be bothered to think things through consistently.

Foot asks his final question, the so-called 'bloodbath' question. As with his previous three questions he doesn't answer it. He devotes several pages to debating whether the Protestants are capable, or willing, to fight to the last drop of blood to defend 'their' state. Then, having concluded, in the teeth of the evidence, that probably they won't, he says that such speculation is anyway not the 'chief answer to the bloodbath argument'. The 'chief answer' apparently lies in Foot's own speculation, or rather gambling, on the following longshot:

"There is a chance, after withdrawal, that Irish labour, so often truncated by religious feuds between workers, might come together to demand the new Ireland of which Connolly dreamed. In the shock of the collapse of the Old Order, the positive sides of the people of Ireland of both religions could well prevail over the narrow superstitions which have kept them at each other's throats for so long."

Quite apart from the fact that Foot has just reduced centuries of communal conflict, which he spent 60 pages proving had a material base, to 'religious feuds' and 'narrow superstitions', this boils down to: maybe if you take the troops away everything will be all right.

This is an assertion, not the answer to a very serious question. It is moreover the same assertion Foot made on page 1 of his book: "There is a way out of the endless cycle of killing and terror. It is for the British government to cut its connection with the state of Northern Ireland and to get out of Ireland." Foot cannot prove this assertion. He does not try. He evades either proving it or answering the 'bloodbath' question by answering another question — why won't Britain withdraw the troops?

He argues that Britain does not keep the troops in Ireland because withdrawal would result in a bloodbath. He says that when Britain withdrew from India and the Central African Federation there were bloodbaths. From this he

does not conclude either that there would be a bloodbath in Ireland or that there wouldn't because things are different in Ireland, but that Britain didn't care that there were bloodbaths in Africa or India, so why should Britain care about a bloodbath in Ireland?

Foot concludes that Britain in fact stays in Ireland because it doesn't want to be 'defeated' by terrorism.

As this is what successive British governments have said openly and repeatedly, it doesn't need a 'fine thinker' like Foot to work it out. Most schoolchildren would come up with the same answer. He couples this conclusion with his original assertion to produce the following:

"As long as...persecution...and [the British] state remain, terrorism and the sectarianism which breeds it, are certain to continue. The fear of 'defeat' therefore is nothing more than political paralysis. It conserves terrorism without ending it. It sustains sectarianism."

Therefore the British people should demand "that the troops come home". The page 1 assertion all over again. The only difference is that 'narrow superstitions' etc. have become 'terrorism' and 'sectarianism', again negating everything previously said about who precisely are the terror merchants in Northern Ireland.

In other words, what Foot is doing is trying to tell us 'Why Britain Must Get Out' by actually telling us 'Why Britain Stays In' — an entirely different question.

Part of the reason this book is so monumentally irritating is that it is so full of inaccuracies, inconsistencies and contradictions that it is extremely difficult to find the politics it is supposed to contain. Foot throws out an argument, a few bits of dodgy history, hypes it up a bit, then concludes that the troops should leave whether or not the original argument supports that conclusion or even has anything to do with it. Foot's arguments and conclusions are entirely unrelated. Consequently, what comes across is that Foot is not particularly convinced himself.

Most rank and file SWP members, who have not been writing about Ireland or involving themselves in Irish politics for as long as Foot has could come up with a more convincing case for withdrawing British troops. Moreover the same rank and file would talk about socialism as the only 'solution' to Ireland's problems, and would argue 'troops out' as an aid to this goal rather than to assist the Catholics to become

Continued on inside
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In most of the hard left today it is difficult to get a rational discussion about whenever we should be for or against the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops. Troops Out is a dogma and a fetish. To question it is to define yourself out of the left. Amongst the most dogmatic and least thoughtful on this question is the SWP — whose members reflexively shout abuse at those who question the wisdom of Troops Out without a political settlement.

Yet, back in 1969 when the British army was first put on the streets in Northern Ireland, the SWP refused to call for their withdrawal. Members of the SWP (IS) who wanted to call for Troops Out were denounced as "bourgeois fascists". The leadership kept up an unprincipled common front against the opposition. For example, Duncan Hallas was in agreement with the opposition, but he either kept his mouth shut or backed Tony Cliff in the debates. For nearly a year IS maintained the position.

Today they deny that they ever had it, and say it is slander to say they did. In the interests of clean living and in the hope of shocking comrades miseducated by the SWP's current line on Ireland — that 'Troops Out Now' is a matter of basic principle which only 'scabs', 'pro-imperialists' and 'Zionists' question — in thinking about the issue, we print this account of what happened in IS in 1969.

In August 1969 the major group on the far left in Britain, panicked by the pogroms in Belfast and Derry, were so relieved to see the British troops go into action that for nearly a whole year they dropped the slogan 'British Troops Out'.

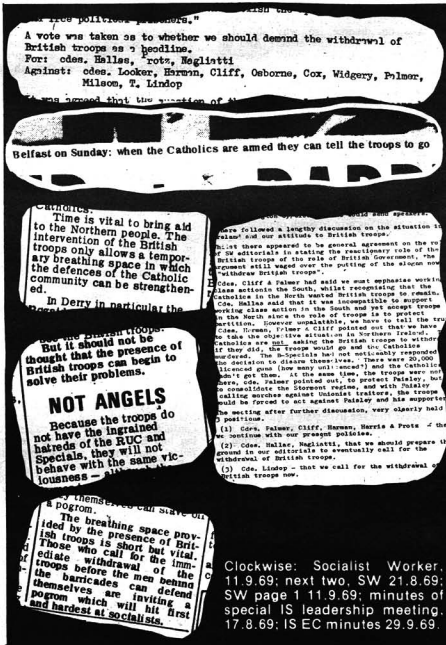
For months before August, when the British troops had no role in Northern Ireland affairs, they had made Troops Out one of their main slogans. It was a front page headline in Socialist Worker in April 1969! In August, when the troops moved centre stage, it was eloquently dropped.

On August 17th 1969, a hastily convened special meeting of members of the two leading committees of the International Socialists voted by 9 to 3 to drop the Troops Out slogan "as a headline", while the text of articles and editorials would make clear that IS wasn't really siding with the British Army.

But the IS leaders were facing both ways. The decision to approve what the troops were doing had to be defended against the IS leadership's critics from the left, notably the Workers' Fight faction within its ranks.

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Socialist Worker and 'Troops Out'



Already in the very first editorial, which was supposed to put to rights the absence of Troops Out "in the headline" by warning about the army's "long term role", Socialist Worker readers were told that though the

troops were "not angels" they will not behave with the same viciousness as the RUC and B-Specials "because they do not have the same ingrained hatreds". (A resolution at the Executive Committee to insert a statement

that the troops' presence was "in the long term interests of British imperialism" had in fact been voted down by Tony Cliff, John Palmer and Paul Foot.)

The warning seemed to consist of the mild-critical thought that "It should not be thought that the British troops can begin to solve the problems (of the Catholic workers). The role of the British troops is not to bring any real (!) solution to the problems of the people of Northern Ireland..."

Within a couple of weeks, the main fire was directed at the leadership's critics. (Meanwhile, a Troops Out emergency motion at IS's conference was defeated after the leaders had pulled out a good many demagogic stops to create an atmosphere of hysteria in which those who argued for Troops Out were accused of being "fascists" who "wanted a bloodbath".)

There were constant attacks in Socialist Worker on "those who call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops", accompanied by warnings about the horrors of life in Catholic Belfast without British troops. "When the Catholics are armed they can tell the troops to go", a front page caption in SW generously conceded. But the idea of these armed Catholics using their bullets to tell the troops to go was just unthinkable: "...they would merely add their bullets to those of the Paisleyites and prove an atmosphere of hysteria in a situation which would lead to massacre." And "when the Catholics are armed" they would tell the troops to go because, the assumption went, they wouldn't need them anymore — not because they were and would be the enemy.

The paper had at first presented the issue as a purely internal Northern Ireland one, as if the British ruling class had no interest in the matter. The troops were passive and neutral: "Behind the lines of British troops the repressive apparatus of Stormont remains" — as if the troops were not themselves repressive.

Containing this line of thought: "The Special Powers Act, which permits imprisonment without trial, has not been revoked!" — presumably, if the troops were really doing a proper job, they might have gone on to revoke the Act. "And when the troops leave..." it will all still be there. It didn't occur to them that the troops might not leave but stay on and themselves imprison people without trial.

The IS leaders concocted an elaborate and convoluted theory of lesser and greater contradictions to justify their position.

The greatest 'contradiction' was between the troops and the Paisleyites, who were thwarting British designs for a bourgeois united Ireland. Meanwhile the 'contradiction' between the troops and the Catholics' barricades, and the Catholic workers' arming and self defence, would only become acute "at some future turn". A centre page article by Stephen Marks presented the case for British troops to stay under the heading: "Fine slogans and grim reality — The contradictory role of British troops gives Catholic workers time to arm against further Orange attacks".

The benefits of the British army in Belfast and Derry were that they were "freezing" the conflict, "buying time" and providing "a breathing space" in which Catholics could prepare to fight the Orange mobs. They could also, apparently, "re-arm politically" in the course of opposing the moderates' calls for reliance on the army — though no thanks to Socialist Worker, which stood four-square with the moderates with its apologetics for the British Army.

The 'contradiction' between the Army and the Catholics' barricades and guns was in fact acute from the first day. The army's aim was to prevent such self-defence — by

substituting for it, and by repressing it.

In the very week when the troops were taking down the barricades this same article talked of a "future turn in the situation when the demolition of the barricades may (!) be needed in the interests of British capital itself and not merely of its local retainers".

IS made a big thing of the barricades. Defence of the barricades had been its militant call, substituted for Troops Out as soon as the troops were on the streets. The special issue of SW on Ireland following the change of line had declared in banner headlines: "The barricades must stay until 'B-Specials' disbanded "RUC disarmed "Special Powers Act abolished "Political prisoners released". And on 11th September the main headline was: "Defend the Barricades — No peace until Stormont goes".

This was in fact a call for British direct rule indefinitely — just as today calls for "Troops Out and Disarm the Protestants" translate in the real world into a demand for more troops not less — for who is going to "Disarm the Protestants"?

But the week the barricades were taken down in Belfast found SW with its main centre page policy article defending SW's failure to call for the troops to go (and in so doing, defending the troops themselves); and the week the barricades were brought down in Derry, as a prole from the liquidation of Free Derry, found SW utterly silent on the question.

To continue to call for the defence of the barricades would have meant to call the Catholics into conflict with the troops — which really would have exposed 'the main contradiction' in IS's line.

When IS finally re-adopted Troops Out in May or June of 1970 on a National Committee resolution from Sean Magtamma of Workers' Fight (they had fought tooth and nail to avoid defeat on the question at the Easter conference two months earlier) the IS leaders said they had been right all along, and of course they were right now to change. One Tory's position "in response to changes in the immediate role of the troops". It all depended on just what the Army was doing at any particular time, though in fact the decisive change in the relationship of the Catholics to the British soldiers didn't come until later, when the switch from a Labour to a Tory government (June) led to a clumsy 'get tough' attitude to the Catholics, and then to the curfew on the Lower Falls in July 1970.

The IS leaders didn't for long hold to that line that they had been right all along. For many years they have denied they ever argued for the troops to stay, and declare that those who say so are slanderers, "scabs", "pro-imperialists", "Zionists" etc.

In true Stalinist fashion they go through the old papers, picking out a quote here and there out of context to support their claim that "week after week after week" they opposed the troops. But there are two simple words that they can never quote after the August of that crucial year, and they are: TROOPS OUT.



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part of the majority in a bourgeois united Ireland, which would not fulfil the oft-quoted Connolly's desires one jot.

But the real tragedy is that Foot's book does not advance his cause at all. The cause is peace in Ireland, and the unity not of geography but of the Irish working class — Orange and Green. There are real injustices in Northern Ireland, injustices arising out of the artificial state imposed by partition. A minority of Catholics have been imprisoned inside this state, and they are entitled to better treatment than they get at the hands of the British army or Orange bigots. They are entitled to fight back — and Foot can call it terrorism if he wishes, but if he does he panders to the very prejudice he claims to be fighting. The fact remains that it is the Catholics who have been systematically terrorised, and oppressed, and it is with these people that our sympathy should lie.

But the British left has a responsibility to do more than sympathise or to raise the empty cry of 'troops out' in isolation from the other issues.

The question why Britain Must Get Out is easily answered: because Britain has done a lot more harm than good, and cannot aid the Irish working class in their struggle for peace, unity and socialism. But if the British troops left tomorrow, a million people calling themselves British would be left behind. They do not want to be incorporated into a Catholic state, and there is far more reason to suppose that they would forcibly resist incorporation than to suppose, as Foot does, that it would all be OK.

The evidence is that the Protestants would fight. The evidence is that there would be a bloody civil war, and that civil war would lead not to unity but to re-partition with, probably, a smaller Protestant state with a smaller Catholic minority. The problem created by the fact that there are two communities in Ireland will not go away with the British troops any more than it can be written away by sleight of hand rhetoric. That problem has to be met head on, confronted, faced up to, not slid round with talk of 'guarantees'.

The reason the problem must be addressed is not to simply conclude that the Protestants will only accept a continuation of the status quo. The status quo is unacceptable, it does not work, it is an artificial creation and it is not the expression of the Protestants' political rights.



Protestants clash with the RUC in Portadown. Photo: John Arthur (Reflex)

**Liz Millward reviews
'Ireland: Why Britain
Must Get Out' by Paul
Foot**

Any consideration of the political situation in Northern Ireland amongst socialists must be based on three central points — one that the oppression of the Catholic minority must be lifted, two that the two segments of the Irish people must be able to live together, and three, that the final goal of any 'solution' must be to unite the Irish working class, Catholic and Protestant, Green and Orange, in a fight for the socialist answer to the ruin, poverty and mass forced emigration which Irish capitalism imposes on the workers of Ireland, North and South of the partition border.

The British left often loses sight of these goals and becomes fixated on slogans — using the history of Ireland to justify the slogans and distorting it in the process. It would do the left good to forget its slogans for a while, and look at the real situation.

British troops are responsible for maintaining the framework of an unjust, unworkable state, which necessitates the denial of civil liberties to a large section of the community, resulting in deaths, maimings, horrors like strip-searching, non-jury courts and mass denial of human rights. Where that community has fought back it has been labelled 'terrorist' and the word has been used to justify further oppression. The Northern Ireland state can only be sustained by these methods because it is artificial and unjust by its very nature.

But any attempt to change the situation comes up against the fact that there are two communities in Northern Ireland. The united Ireland which would satisfy the Catholics is unacceptable to

How not to argue for withdrawal

the Protestants, and they have always been prepared to fight to stop a united independent Ireland.

When Britain has tried to impose a more equitable framework on an unworkable system the Protestants have fought them — as they fought power-sharing in 1974. There is every reason to suppose they would do so again and that they would fight the Catholics as well. So any suggestion of a united Ireland comes into conflict with an apparently immovable obstruction.

The Protestants do not want to be a large minority in a Catholic state. They are a distinct community, considering themselves British or at least different from the Irish majority.

The way to get them to agree to a united Ireland is not to simply pull out British troops and leave them to sink or swim. But it is not reasonable to allow the current situation to continue because the Protestants don't want change.

The Protestants must have rights as a large minority in a united Ireland, and the structure of the new state should be such that the majority cannot remove those rights. The only possible structure which could work is that of a federal united Ireland, freeing the Northern Catholics from their oppression, but giv-

ing the Protestants local autonomy in the geographical area where they form the majority (which is not the whole of Northern Ireland by any means).

A solution ensuring the security of both communities gives a real chance that the communal divisions can break down. Just calling for socialism won't suffice, because the working class in Ireland is both Catholic and Protestant and only the united working class can make socialism. It is wishful thinking to suppose the working class can be united now, under these conditions, by bread-and-butter issues and calls for socialism. Unity may be possible for a short time for a few people, or on a few issues — but such accord swiftly breaks down in a country split by communal tension.

There is no magic slogan which will ensure peace, unity and the potential to build socialism. The debate has been raging on the left for many years with too much hiding behind slogans and far too little honest appraisal of reality.

The blurb on the back of Paul Foot's offering to the debate on Ireland (*Ireland: Why Britain Must Get Out*) describes the

turn to page 61