
Northern Ireland Perspectives



A Militant Pamphlet 50p

Introduction

WE ARE printing this document, written at the end of 1986, because it provides a clear class analysis of the situation here in Northern Ireland by the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It should be read in conjunction with the earlier and more comprehensive *Northern Ireland — a Marxist Analysis* which deals in more detail with the national question and the general perspectives for the development of the working class movement.

The period since the Agreement was introduced has been one of heightened sectarianism with the working class pushed onto the defensive. Now, in the aftermath of the June '87 election a new situation has developed. A new opportunity now exists for the working class to move onto the offensive.

That the Tories could win a third consecutive term, despite their reactionary policies, is a searing indictment of the role of the right-wing Labour and trade union leaders over recent years. The fact that these leaders moved to the right, abandoned left and socialist policies, and distanced themselves from the struggles of the miners, print unions, Liverpool Council and others, allowed the Tories to go to the country with a significant lead in the opinion polls.

During the campaign Kinnock and his right-wing handlers singularly failed to present any socialist alternative to the Tories. They relied on slick presentation which was all form and no content.

The right-wing argument that socialist ideas lose votes was definitively answered by the result. According to the right, Labour fought a brilliant campaign — yet they lost! Moreover in those areas where the campaign and candidate were most closely associated with the right wing Labour generally got the worst result. Bryan Gould, the party's campaign manager, managed to produce a 8.3% swing to the Tories in his own seat.

Compare this with the achievement of four *Militant* supporters who fought on a clear socialist programme: Pat Wall — 9.9% swing from the SDP in Bradford North; Dave Nellist — 5.3% swing to Labour from the Tories in Coventry SE; John Bryan — 3.6% Liberal to Labour swing in Bermondsey (overall in London there was a 0.5% swing from Labour to the Tories); and Terry Fields who produced a 12.4% swing from the Tories and almost doubled his majority in Liverpool Broadgreen.

The Tories won because of the failure of the Labour leaders and because they were able to partially disguise the real depths of the economic malaise which afflicts British capitalism. The election took place in the latter period of the current shaky boom in the world economy. Looming on the horizon is the prospect of a new recession at a certain stage. This Tory government, with its programme of further assaults on living standards and services will be confronted by huge movements of the working class.

Even now, in this period of 'boom' there has been an upturn in the class struggle as workers have moved to demand their share of the fruits of economic growth. Defeated on the political front the working class will now have no choice but to turn to the industrial front.

These struggles will leave their mark within the unions and within the Labour Party as workers attempt to push their organisations to the left. What has already taken place within the CPSA and the NCU is a harbinger of future developments within the labour movement as a whole.

Despite the conflicting factor of sectarianism the same processes are at work in the North. The Anglo-Irish Agreement is less of a central issue than at the time this document was

written. The opposition of the mass of Protestants to the accord has in no way abated. But, as the Marxists predicted in advance, the Agreement in reality has proved inoperable and has not been implemented. During the first six months of 1987 the previously much vaunted Anglo-Irish Conference has met on a grand total of two occasions! Nothing of note has come from these meetings.

Moreover the British government has been at pains to appease the Unionists. The Anglo-Irish Agreement is no longer presented as an historic breakthrough or as the basis for the final solution of the Irish question. Northern Ireland Tory spokesmen now talk of the Agreement remaining in place until something better can be negotiated. Again, as the Marxists predicted at the outset, far from concessions, the pact has produced increased repression in the Catholic areas. Loughgall not Hillsborough is the watchword of the present policy of the ruling class.

Despite the opening of the talks between the Unionists and government any way out of the current political impasse is as far away as ever. It cannot be too often emphasized that no solution is possible on a capitalist basis.

Even given the relative downturn in the level of sectarian violence the situation remains explosive. The breakdown of talks, the loyalist assassination campaign and the deliberately provocative escalation of the Provos' campaign are all factors which could flip the scales in the direction of renewed sectarian bloodletting.

Nonetheless the mood of the mass of workers, Catholic and Protestant is not at present in favour of sectarian conflict. As sectarian issues have receded class issues have come to the fore.

As in Britain the period immediately before and after the election has seen a sharp up-turn in the class struggle, significant strikes — by civil servants, teachers, Telecom workers, in the shipyard, in Shorts, the meat plants and in other workplaces — have taken place.

Even bigger movements of the working class and of the youth are likely in the short term, but certain at some stage in the life of this government.

So, paradoxically, the election defeat in Britain can act as a powerful spur to the industrial movement of the working class in the North.

Just as the sectarian reaction of the past eighteen months unfolded in an uneven manner, so the development of the class movement will be likewise uneven.

But excluding major developments which can throw things back, the most likely general line of development will be to the left.

In this context the previous perspectives of the Marxists, temporarily cut across by the Anglo-Irish Agreement, for a transformation and re-transformation of the unions and the creation of a Labour Party at a certain stage, will tend to be borne out.

The analysis and programme of *Militant* have been graphically confirmed and re-confirmed by recent events. Only on the basis of the socialist ideas we put forward can there be a way out for the working class.

We have proved our ability to retain and develop these ideas under unfavourable conditions. Now events are beginning to move in our favour. The challenge now is to seize the opportunities which will present themselves and develop Marxism into a mass force among the working class.

PERSPECTIVES for Northern Ireland (November 1986)

THE YEAR of the Anglo-Irish Agreement has provided a confirmation of the analysis of the Marxists. Even down to points of detail our prognoses have been borne out.

In attempting to come to grips with the new situation opened up by this agreement, those who set out from a narrow national viewpoint will fall flat on their faces. Marxism always sets out from a world outlook. Today this is more necessary than ever given the integration of the productive forces worldwide, and from this the interrelation of the process of world revolution.

After the Second World War, capitalism experienced a period of boom. In the mid-1970s this gave way to a period of generalised crisis and recession. The cyclical rhythm of capitalist production of boom and slump remains, but now the overall tendency is toward the contraction of production.

This is an organic crisis. The means of production have come into collision with the restraints of private property and the nation state. Excess productive potential is manifest not in overproduction as in the past, but in excess or unused capacity in the factories. Even in boom periods the capitalists now use only about 80% of capacity. The world ship-building industry, despite years of closures which have destroyed 20% of previous capacity, still has 40% excess capacity.

Mass unemployment is now a permanent feature of capitalism, through boom and slump. It is an insoluble problem for all the main capitalist economies.

The protracted nature of the present cyclical upswing since 1982 does not falsify this analysis. This boom is based mainly on fictitious capital. It was artificially generated by the huge sums spent by the Reagan administration, principally on armaments.

It has been the U.S. budget deficit (\$170 billion each year) and from this America's trade deficit (\$170-200 billion) which has fuelled most of the expansion of Europe, Canada and Japan.

The collapse in commodity prices, including oil, has been a further factor prolonging the upswing. This adjustment of the terms of trade has transferred billions of dollars from the poor nations to the rich, bolstering the profits of the major multi-nationals. This at the cost of a further tightening of the economic rack on which the economies of Asia, Latin America and Africa are pinioned.

This boom is not based on a development of the productive forces or a broadening of productive investment. By its fictitious character it has sharpened the contradictions within world capitalism. Already in 1986 there has been a marked slowdown of this rate of growth particularly in America. A new recession is being prepared.

Ultimately the conditions are ripening for a slump, with a collapse similar to that of 1929-31. If not in the next recession, this prospect hangs over the head of the capitalist system as a likely prospect at some stage in the coming period.

This crisis, and the parallel but fundamentally different crisis of Stalinism, opens a new era. For the capitalists there is no way out. They have no choice but to seek an answer by maintaining profits at the expense of the living standards of

the working class. This opens the way to class conflict on an unprecedented scale.

The coming decades will see the biggest movements of the working class in world history. If, and only if, a leadership is built to carry these movements forward, the world socialist revolution can be successfully carried through in this period.

Recent struggles are an anticipation of what is to come. The era of mass upheaval, of extreme volatility, of wars, of revolution and of counter-revolution has begun. In the colonial world the revolutions in Haiti and the Philippines have started out along classical lines. Even greater explosions are being prepared in these and other colonial countries. In the advanced countries the class struggle has reached a stage of bitter confrontation. Scandinavia, former 'model' for the bourgeois and the reformists alike, has seen major industrial movements, most recently in Sweden. The British miners' strike is a harbinger of things to come in all these countries.

In general the movement of the working class to transform its traditional organisations is still at an early stage. With the partial exception of Greece the conditions laid down by Trotsky in the 1930s for fruitful work in the mass reformist parties have not yet materialised.

It is most likely that the next recession will prompt a movement of the working class into its old organisations. This will begin the real process of the transformation of the old organisations, the trade unions and the reformist parties, social democratic and Stalinist. From the struggles between the classes and from this conflict within the workers' organisations the basis of mass revolutionary parties of the working class can be created.

In the advanced countries, in the colonial world and also in the Stalinist states, the process of revolution is unfolding. Marxism has never enjoyed a more favourable period.

Like all other historical processes, that of revolution does not proceed in a straight line. The general line of development to the left is actualised, not smoothly or directly, but punctuated with interruptions, zig-zags, setbacks and defeats.

In every country the working class will at some stage or stages find itself temporarily thrown back. There will be moments of disorientation and of confusion. Temporary moods of reaction can develop affecting even layers of the workers. At times the masses will pause to draw breath or heal the wounds of battle. All this is the inevitable consequence of a reformist leadership of all shades, from right reformism through to the most left variants of centrism. Given the nature of the present leadership, setbacks are an inevitable and also necessary part of the general overall process of the development of a revolutionary alternative.

The period since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November 1985 has been one of setback for the workers' movement in Northern Ireland. Temporarily the forces of sectarianism and of reaction have been strengthened. Albeit unevenly, and encountering its own obstacles and difficulties, the general direction of events has been to the right.

All this is a consequence of the failures, over a period, of the trade union and labour leaders in the North, South and Britain. The history of Northern Ireland, even of the period of 'the troubles' is a history of missed opportunities and outright betrayals by the leaders of the workers' organisations.

1968-69 was a period of revolutionary opportunity. With

no class alternative given by their leaders the mass movement of the time was diverted into a sectarian cul-de-sac.

The working class paid the price with a period of vicious sectarian reaction lasting until the end of 1978. The trade unions were forced onto the defensive. The Northern Ireland Labour Party was destroyed.

The capacity of the working class to recover from even such heavy blows was quickly demonstrated. 1976 opened with a renewed class offensive against sectarianism. This was shaped by the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) leaders into the 'Better Life For All Campaign'. Demonstrating the utter spinelessness of right-wing reformism this opportunity was bureaucratically squandered. So it was with many other opportunities in the years which followed.

After 1976-77 there was a period of uneasy equilibrium. The bigots remained on the defensive restrained by the opposition of the working class. Yet the workers could not go forward because of the bureaucratic strait-jacket imposed by the leadership.

Failure to build on the initial opposition to Thatcher including the magnificent half-day strike in April 1980, paved the way for a further setback. Events surrounding the H-block hunger strikes of 1981 opened a new sectarian polarisation, compounded by the shortsighted and callous intransigence of the Thatcher government.

Nonetheless, the working class recovered. 1982 was a year of class upheaval dominated by the health strikes and the unity of Protestant and Catholic workers these engendered. Again there was an opportunity for a class offensive, industrially by mobilising other workers, and politically by using these events as the launching pad for a Labour Party. Instead the leadership played a conscious wrecking role. The health workers were sold out and the issue of politics was ducked.

The deep sectarian reaction since the Hillsborough accord has been possible only because of this record of failure and betrayal.

● No solution under capitalism

Current events entirely validate the Marxist hypothesis that either the working class will offer a socialist solution or else society in Northern Ireland will ultimately be headed down the road of far worse sectarian conflict than has occurred to date.

There is no capitalist solution. Not even partial resolution of the national problem in Ireland is possible on the basis of this economic system.

When capitalism played a progressive role in developing production it was capable, in those countries where it first developed, of assimilating different peoples into nations and partially at least, resolving tensions and differences between them.

In the present epoch of economic stagnation, of the impoverishment of the working class and of counter reforms, the general tendency, starkly in the colonial world but also increasingly manifest in the advanced countries, is towards the exacerbation of the national problem. The root of the conflict in Ireland is the economic crisis North and South. Enfeebled economically, both the British and Irish bourgeoisie are impotent in relation to the national problem. Their stupidity in conceiving the Anglo-Irish Agreement is a symptom of the historical weakness of the Irish bourgeoisie and the degeneration of British capitalism and its political representatives.

The extreme sickness of the Southern Irish economy and the consequences thereof are being dealt with in other *Militant* material. This material should be read and appreciated as a basis for an understanding not just of Southern perspectives but for a full grasp of the situation in the North also.

Economically the North is unviable and in a state of chronic crisis. During and since the 1970s it has experienced the worst effects of the world downswings, while by and large missing out on the interspersed booms. The recent years of the upswing have little effect other than to slow the pace of decline in the North.

This is seen in the figures for manufacturing, the real base of the economy. Between 1975 and '84 there has been a 35% fall in manufacturing employment. In 1985 manufacturing output was 17% lower than 1973.

A manufacturing workforce of less than 100,000, at a time when over 120,000, are officially unemployed, represents a pitifully small economic base on which to lay hopes of a recovery.

In reality the traditional manufacturing base of ship-building, textiles and engineering is in terminal decline. Meanwhile the multinational offshoots, lured by handouts and incentives in the 1960s and early 1970s, have tended to shut up shop and pull out as they move to rationalise and concentrate production during recession.

Private enterprise in Northern Ireland is not a lame but a dead duck. Existing industrial jobs are only maintained by state handouts in the form of subsidies, grants, tax concessions and other aid, to the tune of approximately £220 million per annum. This represents a third of industry's total wages bill.

Despite this industrial contraction there has been a quite significant consumer boom over the past two years. This is based, as is the similar boom in Britain, very largely on the extension of credit. The retail trade has also received significant stimulus from cross border-shoppers. Overall it reflects the huge overdependence of the entire economy on the public sector, whose wage packets keep the supermarkets and the service sector in general afloat.

Projected public spending for 1985-86 at £4,270 million is equal to 77% of GDP, as compared to 45% in Britain as a whole. 45% of all jobs are in the public sector. Add on those in the state-owned manufacturing sector, Harland and Wolff and Shorts, plus private sector jobs paid for by the state subsidies, plus those dependent on the public sector for their market, and the colossal over-reliance on state spending is obvious.

Within this lopsided economy the books balance only through the annual subvention from the British Exchequer. Northern Ireland now costs British imperialism £1,404 million (1984/85 figure) plus £135 million to maintain the army presence. These figures understate the true subsidy since a large slice of local income from taxation is in fact recouped Government spending as it is taxation of incomes in the public sector. From a source of exploitation and profit the remnant of the direct imperialist domination of Ireland has become a huge financial drain.

During the 1970s manufacturing job losses were partly compensated for by the expansion of public and service sector employment. The turn to monetarist austerity has halted the rise in the public sector. A new recession and more austerity measures will mean rising unemployment and a further economic decline.

Even with current levels of public spending poverty is widespread. In 1983 (latest available figures) average weekly household income in Northern Ireland was 20.6% less than that of the UK as a whole. In the coming period the capitalists will be compelled to attempt to drive down living standards even further.

This scenario of economic gloom, and with it of attacks on wages and the social wage, is the fundamental feature of perspectives. It is this which precludes any prospect of stability being achieved on the basis of capitalism.

There is no possibility of any lasting settlement within the confines of the Northern Ireland state. The Catholic working class cannot be permanently accommodated to the existence of a state which brings only poverty and repression.

Their aspiration for a united Ireland is a desire for change, for a new society North and South and through it an improvement in their lot. It is an aspiration they will not relinquish. Any deal which could be arrived at between the political parties within the North could at best be no more than an interlude. The unmistakable general tendency within the state is towards conflict and ultimately fragmentation.

On the other hand, outside of the socialist revolution, there is no possible alteration to the present constitutional arrangements, which would not immediately provoke massive upheaval.

Integration with Britain is a non-starter. It is completely contrary to the wishes of the British ruling class who want to shrug off the problem of the North, not manacle themselves to it. It would solve nothing in terms of the alienation of the minority and would simply allow the Provos to shift their campaign into a new gear.

Even more so, capitalist re-unification is entirely unattainable. In an irony of history this is now the desired answer of the British ruling class but is feared and would in practice be opposed by the Southern bourgeoisie. British imperialism created the problem by fomenting sectarianism and by partitioning the country. Now, for the economic reasons already given, and because of other factors dealt with in other documents (See *Northern Ireland — a Marxist Analysis*), they have no interest in maintaining their direct hold in the North. They would like to withdraw but cannot because they can see what the consequences would be.

To the Protestants re-unification means subjugation in an alien state. The slightest serious step in such a direction would unleash massive Protestant resistance. If any government were to pursue this path they would be forced to hastily retreat or else would precipitate civil war throughout Ireland.

Independence is an answer put forward by some loyalist paramilitaries and other Protestant ultras. There is no broad support for this idea. Protestant workers can clearly see that the economics of independence would mean mass pauperisation.

Only in the context of massive sectarian violence and as a desperate last resort would this idea gain any echo. But as re-unification is to the Protestants so independence would be to the Catholics. The Catholic minority would never voluntarily place their necks under the jackboots of the loyalist state. UDI would mean civil war.

● Civil War

A civil war would not result in the driving of the Protestants into the sea as some republican elements imagine. There will be no united Ireland built on the bones of a million Protestants. Instead the Protestant community would become an armed camp and, fighting for survival, would win just as the Jews won in Palestine in 1947.

The outcome would be re-partition, refugee camps, and a new Middle East on the edge of Europe. It would be a colossal setback for the working class throughout Ireland and for the working class in Britain.

While nothing the ruling class can do will solve the problem the conflict itself provides a constant pressure on them to do something. Hence the string of failed initiatives since the dissolution of Stormont in 1972.

Of all these schema the most short sighted and ill fated is the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Because it creates the impression of being more far reaching than it actually is, it is the most counter-productive of all the capitalists' 'solutions' even from their own point of view. This accord was launched by the British and Irish governments with the support of Reagan and the American bourgeoisie who were looking over their shoulders at the 40 million US citizens who claim

Irish descent. Despite the plaudits, hurrahs and kudos of the time it is in reality nothing new.

The deal represents the same old mix of concessions and repression served up in a new dish. It was intended to introduce a few minimal largely cosmetic concessions to the Catholic minority — on the courts, the operation of the UDR, in flags and emblems, Irish street names etc. But its main aim was to improve security co-operation North and South and increase repression. In the guarded language of the *Financial Times* "The main purpose of the Agreement is to reduce terrorism" (29.11.85).

Thatcher's handling of the 1981 hunger strikes won her government a pyrrhic victory. The prisoners were defeated but at the cost of the alienation of the Catholic population. Thatcher's unnecessary, and, from a bourgeois point of view, stupid intransigence provided Sinn Fein with its electoral base. The hold, even the existence, of the SDLP was threatened.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was an attempt to put this right by isolating the Provos and boosting the SDLP. On every count it has been a gross miscalculation. Trying to correct one mistake the ruling class have merely compounded it with another. The problem of the minority remains unresolved but is now added to by the even bigger problem of the majority.

The roots of this miscalculation lie in the government's false estimation of the Protestant reaction to the accord. Thatcher's original conception that the mass of Protestants would come to see the Agreement as no threat to them lies in ruins. Because of the ham-fisted manner of its introduction and because it appears to go further than it does, it has aroused such a fierce Protestant opposition that the entire thing is and will remain completely inoperable.

Already the government has been forced to acknowledge the opposition of the Protestants. Nothing of substance has been implemented through the Agreement. All that exists is the framework of an agreement, completely lacking in content.

Despite its defiant utterances to the contrary, imperialism will be forced to retreat on this accord. To implement it by introducing substantial concessions would make all-out conflict virtually certain. Faced with a sectarian backlash and the threat of civil war imperialism would unceremoniously scrap the accord.

Recognising this the strategy of the ruling class has been to keep the Agreement in place but not implement it. Even this is fraught with danger because so long as the Agreement exists the possibility of massive sectarian violence remains inherent in the situation.

To contain the Protestant opposition the Agreement has in reality been put on ice. This situation cannot continue indefinitely. To the Catholic working class the most visible change it has brought has been an increase in repression. Catholic workers will not forever be placated with promises. They will exert pressure on the SDLP to produce results. In turn these pressures will be placed on the Southern government. If nothing results the initial sceptical support given by Catholic workers will turn to opposition.

Either way, through implementation or non-implementation, the end result will be the shattering of the Agreement. On every front the ruling class will have obtained precisely the opposite outcome to that intended.

Seeking to boost so-called moderate Unionism and prepare for power sharing Thatcher has managed the reverse. The Official Unionists have been paralysed. The ineffectualness of their leaders is the underlying explanation for the divisions which have surfaced between wings of the party.

Paisley and more particularly the 'young Turks' within the DUP have been permitted to move centre stage. Future mass loyalist reaction, should it develop, would crystallise around such people. It would encompass hardliners in both Unionist parties, groups like the Ulster Clubs, the UDR ranks, and

in its ultimate stages, the RUC also. The loyalist paramilitaries would be brought into tow of such a movement, providing its physical force battalions.

Reaction has not reached such a stage. So the 'armies' formed by Paisley retain, even now, an evanescent character, yet they are not to be dismissed. Such forces are a quite serious threat in the short term. Actions such as the sealing off of villages could precipitate pogroms. Were the Anglo-Irish Agreement to be implemented these forces could swell and become a vehicle for armed reaction. They give a glimpse of what will happen in the long term if the labour movement does not provide a socialist way out for the mass of Protestant and Catholic workers.

Both of the main loyalist paramilitaries, the UDA and UVF, but particularly the UDA, have experienced a revival thanks to the Agreement. These organisations remain repugnant to the broad mass of the Protestant population especially the working class and cannot provide the main vehicle for reaction. They have recruited from among the more backward and lumpenised sections.

Mass protests — strikes, demonstrations, rallies and a mini-election — have not openly shifted the government. None of the main Unionist politicians have any strategy to do so. Protestant anger and frustration caused by this will benefit the paramilitaries further. An escalation of their activities; petrol bombing, intimidation, bombings, possible bombs in the South, and perhaps a resumption of the assassinations is likely in the short term.

The National Front, despite its efforts and its claims, will not develop beyond a handful. Were it to raise its head too far it is likely that some of its loyalist paramilitary 'allies' would step on it, having no love for potential rivals.

● SDLP and Provos

The first effects of the Agreement were to give an electoral boost to the SDLP, based on risen expectations among Catholics. This will not be long lasting. As these expectations are dashed the SDLP will either give partial expression to the mood of anger which will spread in the Catholic areas or else it will find itself back in the precarious electoral situation prior to the pact or worse.

As the Molyneux brand of 'moderate' Unionism has been and will be weakened, so correspondingly the pro-devolution wing of the SDLP will tend to lose ground. Either the party as a whole or the more substantial part of it will most likely be driven to a strident nationalistic position. Depending on how Hume responds, the result could be the emergence of Mallon as its effective leader.

The ruling class considered that the Anglo-Irish Agreement would bring forward the prospect of devolution and power-sharing. It has polarised the community, isolated the advocates of such a solution within their own parties and thus backfired entirely.

Similarly a long term fall in support for Sinn Fein will not be brought about by this Agreement. Other things being equal Sinn Fein will recoup initial losses as the Agreement runs into sand. There are, however, complicating factors which make the perspectives for Sinn Fein extremely conditional.

Individual terrorism is a false method of struggle. Only the working class, by mass action, can change society. Individual terror means the substitution of a small cabal for the actions of the mass. It lowers the consciousness and the participation of the working class and is the road to isolation.

The Provos' campaign can never succeed. Despite the eulogies it receives from the know-nothing ultra-left groups in Britain and internationally it has not a single shred of justification. These methods will not defeat imperialism. They lead to greater repression. They divide the working class thereby setting back the prospect of socialism and with

it reunification. The Provos' actions are a provocation, sometimes quite deliberate, to a loyalist reaction which if fully unleashed they would be powerless to resist.

Over the past decade and a half the Provos have been repeatedly pushed back. However poverty, unemployment, repression and the complicating facts of the intractable national problem have always provided them with a layer of recruits and at times have conjoined to drive a substantial layer towards them. In this way the Provos' campaign can continue virtually indefinitely. Individual terrorism is now an endemic feature of the situation. It is a sign of capitalist society at an impasse.

The Provos' campaign is supported by a layer of the Catholic population and tolerated by a broader strata. However a substantial section of the Catholic community, including a large layer of the working class, are entirely alienated from them. The more intense the military campaign, especially in the urban areas, the greater the opposition from within the Catholic areas. Despite all the rhetoric about the twin strategies of the ballot box and the armalite, the armed struggle is a check on the development of Sinn Fein's support beyond a certain level.

Throughout the troubles Sinn Fein have been an adjunct of the Provos and nothing more. In 1981 the Northern Provos' leadership stumbled quite by accident on a 'political strategy'. The hunger strike, which they had opposed as a tactic in any case, and the enormous sympathy for the plight of the prisoners, spilled over into votes for Sinn Fein. Without any foreknowing they found themselves propelled by events along a political road.

After the event came the rationalisation and theoretical justification — the ballot box and the armalite speech of Danny Morrison. The attempt to marry these will be as successful as efforts to mix oil and water. The methods of the secret society and of an open political party run counter not together. Those who place the emphasis on politics are bound to come to resent the irritant of their support being continually undermined by military actions. Those who are militarists first and foremost will start to question the motives of their political allies and the resources consumed by elections, advice centres and the like.

The split-off of Republican Sinn Fein is a first open consequence of these irresolvable contradictions. Although superficially on the same issue — abstentionism — this is not a repeat of the 1969-70 split which produced the Provisionals and the Officials.

At that time a section of the Southern bourgeois financed the Provos and prompted the split. It came in the context of mass upheaval in the Catholic areas of the north. This, plus the failure of the old guard Stalinist leadership of the republican movement to defend the areas from pogroms, very quickly provided the Provos with a substantial base among the Catholic youth.

Adams, McGuinness and Co represent no re-run of the Officials sixteen years on. This split is not even a half step towards a ceasefire by this leadership as a whole. The Provos remain a military organisation first and foremost.

Nor does it betoken a grouping towards a socialist position. Stripped of the empty 'radical' and 'semi-socialist' rhetoric the politics of these people is fundamentally the same as the old guard nationalists who have left them.

The 1986 split arose out of the contradictions within the Provisionals but has done nothing to resolve them. The division between electoral and military strategy remains. By attracting members on the basis of illusions in the 'left' nature of the Adams leadership tensions within the movement may actually be sharpened over a period. The split is not an end but a preparation for further splits.

Republican Sinn Fein will not displace the Provos in the manner in which the Provos pushed the Officials to one side in the early 1970s. Nor are they entirely insignificant.

Depending on what steps the O'Brady, O'Connell leader-

ship take they can gain from future defections from Sinn Fein and become a force particularly in the border areas.

The logic of the split points to the establishment of a military wing by the new group. If a new Republican IRA is set up it will be a further complicating factor in perspectives. Such a body from its right-wing nationalist standpoint, would be capable of the type of madcap military escapades and acts of sectarian incitement which have been the hallmark of the INLA. While only a secondary factor they can nonetheless provide a further half twist in the process of sectarian disintegration which has taken place.

Further divisions, plus the fetter of the military struggle, present a barrier to Sinn Fein. Nonetheless, it is most likely that they will not only recover the ground lost because of initial Catholic support for the Agreement, but will be poised to make further advances in its aftermath.

It is not likely that they will entirely replace or fragment the SDLP. Despite their difficulties the SDLP will probably remain the majority Catholic party over a period, albeit that they will be forced to attempt to out nationalist Sinn Fein in order to do so.

Overall the first year of the Anglo-Irish Agreement has set in motion events which point towards the Lebanonisation of the North. It has been a period of general setback for the working class.

Still the sectarian violence has not overspilled into civil war. There are two interconnecting reasons. First is the refusal of the British government to implement anything of substance through the Agreement. Consequently the anger of the Protestants has simmered a few degrees below boiling point.

Second and of key importance has been the opposition of the mass of the working class to the petrol bombings, the murders and the intimidation. The historic strike action by DHSS workers in August '86 forced the paramilitaries to retreat.

This strike and actions by other workers halted the drift to all-out conflict at least for a period. It won the initiative from the bigots and created an opening for the labour movement. Under the pressure generated by the DHSS and other workers and in no small measure because of the campaign by the Marxists within the unions, the trade union leaders have been forced to launch a campaign against sectarianism.

From their point of view this has been an exercise in letting off steam. What rank and file workers had demanded was a development of and improvement on the 'Better Life For All' campaign. What the leadership have provided has been a parody of the campaign.

NIC-ICTU's latest campaign will be stillborn. It has been bureaucratically conceived and bureaucratically run. Initiative and discussion have been smothered. As a result the NIC-ICTU leaders have left the initiative once again to the sectarians.

No serious campaign against sectarianism will be initiated by the union leaders. Without taking up such issues as defence, as the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and without at least moving in a political direction, all that they can offer are pious platitudes. Neither sentimental resolutions or pacifist phrases will make the slightest impression on the bigots.

It is possible that rank and file action against the excesses of the bigots may again be taken. But given the criminal role of the leadership, a sustained campaign which could halt the rise in sectarianism is virtually excluded so long as the Anglo-Irish Agreement remains in place.

● *Ulster TUC*

No thanks to the NICTU leadership the trade union movement remains intact. Once again the tenacity with which the working class clings to its existing mass organisations has been shown. The campaign for an Ulster TUC has gained an

echo in certain workplaces but no union or union branches have yet split off.

The NICTU chiefs are pathetically incapable of answering the arguments of loyalist workers and their academic advisors or of campaigning in the workplaces against them. Trying to appease the loyalists they remain silent on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Now this silence paralyses them when attempting to defend themselves from loyalist opposition.

It cannot be excluded that some sections of workers will split from the NIC-ICTU. A major division still remains a long way off. It would take the development of sectarian reaction on a grand scale to bring to birth an Ulster TUC. While some of the most backward workers may enthusiastically back the idea, the mass of Protestant workers understand that a split would not only be from the ICTU but from the British-based unions to which most belong. Their class instincts teach them that separate local unions would be in a weaker bargaining position. They may be hostile to the inept NIC-ICTU bureaucracy but they have no more confidence in the various loyalist workers' groups, so-called, and rightly so.

An Ulster TUC would not be a matter of mere organisational hiatus within the unions. It would mean the division of the unions along sectarian lines. It implies a sectarian division within the workplaces and the driving of Catholic workers out of the main factories. In the worst, but least likely, scenario this may become possible, but only on the basis of a dramatic escalation of sectarian upheaval, and not because of the arguments or activities of groups like the misnamed British and Irish Communist Organisation or their shadowy accomplices in the loyalist underworld.

To what extent the working class will have been set back by the entire episode of the Anglo-Irish Agreement it is not yet possible to say. Outside of a civil war situation or of large scale pogroms and Lebanonisation, and this is not the likely outcome, it will be a setback of a quite serious but still a partial character.

The basic structures of the workers' organisations will most likely emerge intact. Sectarian polarisation will have been intensified but the crucial unity on the shopfloor and inside the trade unions will most likely be maintained. As in the 1970s the working class can quickly recover from the defeat it has suffered. Class issues can very speedily come to the fore.

This recovery and the development of the class movement will not take place in a straight line. The Agreement will leave a sectarian residue. Hardliners on both sides will have been boosted.

In its aftermath, partly depending on how it ends, a further period of sectarianism is likely. However, provided some other complicating issue does not arise, a mood of opposition to sectarianism can also begin to crystallise and harden.

Any decline in the support and activities of the bigots and paramilitaries will be likewise uneven. It is precisely when they begin to lose support that these groups are capable of the most desperate measures to try to regain ground. Inherent in such a situation would be the possibility of a movement of the working class against sectarianism, perhaps putting that of 1975-76 in the shade.

Perspectives can only provide a general prognosis not a blueprint. Always they are conditional. With the present labyrinthine complexity of events they are more conditional than ever.

Sudden turns and sharp changes are the key. Events can throw society in one direction or another for whole periods. The underlying general line of development can be almost completely obscured.

The job of a perspective is to lay bare the underlying direction of events so that the orientation and work of the Marxists is not thrown off course by secondary developments.

It is necessary again to return to the fundamentals. On a

world scale this is an epoch of revolution, not of reaction. Its key features are the organic crisis of the capitalist system, the crisis of bureaucratic mismanagement of Stalinism, the radicalisation of the working class and the increased volatility of the middle layers of society. Of no small importance is the beginning of the emergence of Marxism as an important force. The coming years will see the ideas of Marxism emerge internationally as a pole of attraction for the working class in a way not seen since the early years of the Third International.

Within Northern Ireland there is sufficient material to precipitate movement after movement of the working class. It is not a matter of the movement having to wait for the class struggle internationally to provide it with sustenance. More likely the working class, Catholic and Protestant, will move on the same issues and in tandem with the movement in Britain especially. The added ingredients of sectarianism and of repression can lend the struggles in the North an even sharper character. Workers locked in confrontation with the ruling class and enduring at the same time the barbs of state and paramilitary violence, can very quickly draw revolutionary conclusions.

If, however, the sectarian reaction should endure for a prolonged period it would be at some stage be cut across by international events, particularly by explosive class movements in Britain and the South.

One way or another big class battles are certain in the North. The working class learns from experience. New 1907s and '32s will sweep away the scepticism, cynicism and demoralisation. Many workers who are today tainted with sectarianism, will tomorrow be prepared to struggle for the socialist revolution.

● *Unions will be transformed*

In the course of these events the trade unions will be transformed from top to bottom. Union bodies and trades councils, now moribund will be filled out by new waves of fresh activists. The downturn in the class struggle has allowed a temporary consolidation of the grip of the right-wing leadership. This is based on inertia.

As the working class takes to the road of struggle a differentiation will open up within the unions. A left will develop and gain force. Whole sections of the unions will be driven to a left position. The Marxists are already well poised to intervene in this process. They have been the only genuine and consistent left force in the unions. Working correctly they can make dramatic gains, winning positions of leadership in many areas, but most importantly building a fortress for Marxism in every factory, every office, every supermarket, every important place of employment.

Recent events have temporarily cut across the process of politicisation of the trade union movement. For the time the issue of a Labour Party has receded from the agenda.

In the course of future struggles, through victories and especially defeats, this issue will more dramatically than ever come to the forefront.

A Labour Party will be built out of the transformation and re-transformation of the trade union movement. Outside of this process and of the politicisation of thousands of trade union activists it will not emerge.

It is a completely false idea that this process can be bypassed by the imposition of a party from above, through the establishment of a region of the British Labour Party. Without the movement of the working class in the North such a party would mean nothing. With such a movement the bureaucratic installation of the British Labour Party would not be the best means to develop a Labour Party. For reasons given in previous documents it is virtually excluded that this step would be taken.

Nor will a Labour Party come from the antics of such

groups as the so-called Labour Party of Northern Ireland or others who will ape them in the future. These people substitute themselves for the movement of the working class. In setting up 'parties' without regard to the actual movements of the class they create only fantasies, which in their passing will leave not even a footprint on history.

A mass Labour Party in the North must be based in the trade unions. To sink roots in the working class it must have the affiliation of at least a large section of the trade union movement.

It will be brought about, over a whole period, by the struggles of workers within the unions, to convert them into fighting organisations and to direct them onto a political road. The Marxists can play a key role in sharpening and accelerating this process of politicisation.

Neither the union bureaucracy nor any section of it will lightly, willingly or voluntarily establish a Labour Party. But at a certain stage the pressure of the rank and file will most likely present them with the choice of dropping their non-political stance or being by-passed. Then and only then, with heavy hearts and with caution dragging their heels, they will move to political involvement.

Under conditions of ferment and struggle when the leaders move an inch the working class will move a mile. A Labour Party in Northern Ireland forged on the back of big events, as soon as it established a mass base, would move to a left reformist and perhaps even more likely, to a centrist position.

Given the work the Marxists have done, and will do, they can be a major force within such a party from the word go. Depending upon events Marxism can very quickly develop as a major and then a mass force. The basis for a mass Marxist party can be laid.

Other than the Marxists, none of the existing left groups, have been able to come to terms with the present situation. The Workers Party, the Communist Party and the hybrid of ultra-left groups have been thrown into confusion.

None of these groups is capable of developing a mass influence. Wrong in theory, wrong in orientation and wrong in method they will be by-passed by the real movements of the working class.

Despite the vacuum on the left the Workers Party can only gain 2% or 3% of the votes. They have evolved from the left centrism of the early 1970s to the reformism and generally right-wing reformism of their leaders today.

In the future they will opportunistically tail-end the real movements of the working class. The most genuine Workers Party members and supporters would look with enthusiasm to the emergence of a Labour Party. Many of its leading figures on the other hand would fall into a Labour Party strengthening its most opportunistic wing.

The Communist Party is and will remain a tiny rump. Yet within it, albeit in microcosm, are revealed all the problems of Stalinism. It is riven with factionalism and disloyalty. The days of the 1930s and '40s when many of the best and most sacrificing workers joined are only a memory.

The degeneration of their paper is a reflection of the loss of the base of the Party in the factories and among the working class. In place of workers they have attracted a layer of the petty bourgeois trendies. Its remaining industrial base is largely older trade unionists who have won positions and are indistinguishable from the right wing in the unions.

The emergence of a genuine left in the unions will take place against the right wing and against the Communist Party. Their historical role is reduced to that of an obstacle to the development of the genuine forces of Marxism. One of the historical tasks of the Marxists is to smash this obstacle and settle accounts with Stalinism once and for all.

Without exception the ultra-left have capitulated to sectarianism. The false ideas and methods of these groups consign them to a future of sterility and splits, the production of even more exotic groupings, more splits and so on. Hegel's

phrase well encapsulates their fate; 'from nothing, through nothing, to nothing.'

Even setbacks and defeats can be a preparation for the development of Marxism. During the crisis over the Anglo-Irish Agreement the Marxists have held firm on the basis of correct perspectives, a clear analysis, and a programme in tune with events. In the process of the revolution ideas are primary. This has been demonstrated in practice as, despite the unfavourable objective situation, the Marxists have managed to make headway.

Even with the continuation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement for a period further advances are possible. The class struggle has not gone into total recess. In particular strikes have taken place since November '85. There have been movements on the issue of cuts. In each the solidarity and potential for class unity has been shown, as in the Wellworth's strike where even in areas of high unemployment like Derry, the picket lines were respected by the working class community as a whole.

In this period gains may be limited to ones, twos or small groups, but those who are won will tend to be of the highest calibre. Comrades who have doggedly remained active, together with those who come to Marxism in adverse circumstances provide the most excellent yeast for the future.

The task now is to develop the work, as far as objective conditions permit, in the unions, on the estates, among the youth and among working class women both in the workplace and at home. If this is successfully done Marxism will emerge from this situation not only unimpaired but poised for the future.

Today it is a struggle against the stream. The future rewards of this work, on the basis of revolutionary events, will be the building of the Northern forces of a mass tendency of Marxism capable of leading the working class on this island to victory, creating a socialist Ireland and, should the revolution in Ireland have come first, paving the way for the victory of the working class in Britain and the creation of a socialist federation of Britain and Ireland. ■

Northern Ireland

A MARXIST ANALYSIS

75p

A MILITANT PAMPHLET

Militant

Solidarity price £1

THE MARXIST PAPER FOR WORKERS UNITY AND SOCIALISM

ISSUE NO. 1234 SEPTEMBER 1984 25p

Tories introduce compulsory 'work for your dole' schemes...

Fight youth conscription

People now in 'daily fear of attack'

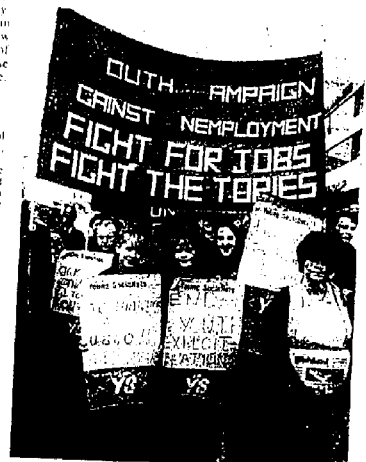
YOUTH under this system are offered no future. Since 1972, unemployment for under 25s has risen from 10,000 to 1 1/2 million. The lucky few in work have to accept lower rates of pay as the bosses increasingly use part-timers as a cheap labour source.

The so-called 'training schemes' are nothing more than a device to get young people into the dole of the system. In the rate of pay feature of the '1200' week had kept up with inflation, the average would have been £19.00, in relation to average earnings, £27.

The latest 'training' to be rolled out is the 'work for your dole' (WFD) scheme. It is an attempt to fiddle the unemployment statistics by getting young people to do 'voluntary' work for a few hours a week. This is a scheme that is designed to make young people feel that their lives are not subsequently wasted.

In fact, 28,000 school leavers decided that they were not going to be forced into WFD schemes. The 240,000 (75% strike action) and 200,000 (70% strike action) Young Socialists are prepared to fight back with their own 'work for your dole' scheme.

The Labour movement must campaign for a decent minimum wage, trade union rights of all workers, and a guaranteed job for all school leavers.



By Robert Carr

Socialists contest Belfast elections

WEST BEREFORE is a general election of state repression. The campaign of the Labour and Trade Union Group in the elections on October 22nd offers the socialist alternative. Workers and youth should vote this opposition to the Tories.

The Labour and Trade Union Group is a body composed of trade union activists and socialist fighting for the formation of a genuine Labour Party in the North based on the Irish workers' youth sections as the Northern Ireland Young Socialists.

To help fight the campaign the Labour and Trade Union Group urgently needs funds. If you can give, please contact: Northern Ireland Young Socialists, 4 Waring St., Belfast 1, Ireland.

DIVIDE AND RULE



by Peter Hadden
Marxist Studies

Essential reading for anyone seeking to understand developments in Northern Ireland today ...

Divide and Rule by Peter Hadden, price £1.40 plus 30p p + p

Northern Ireland — A Marxist Analysis, price 75p plus 30p p + p

Militant, Irish Marxist paper for workers' unity and socialism, published on a monthly basis. Subscribe for 6 (12) issues: Ireland and Britain £3 (£5); Europe £4 (£7); elsewhere US\$10 (US\$15). Send to Militant at 4 Waring St., Belfast, or 75 Middle Abbey St., Dublin 1, Ireland.