

**Irish
Workers
Group**



Hume/Adams, the 'peace' offensive and Republicanism

Articles and leaflets from IWG/LRCI 1993

**There can be no peace as
long as the Northern State
oppresses anti-unionists!**

30p

Mobilise Working Class Solidarity and self-defence against loyalist attacks!

There can be no peace as long as the Northern State oppresses anti-unionists!

The murder gangs of Ulster Loyalism have struck again in Greysteel. This latest episode in what these monsters dub 'ethnic cleaning' creates a sense of mounting peril and beleaguering among the anti-unionist masses in town and country. For it is no accident, as every anti-unionist knows, that the death squads are able to act with such murderous efficiency and impunity whenever they strike.

Not only are whole sections of the so-called 'security forces' complicit in providing them with both the means and opportunity of striking where they will; but it is to the immediate political advantage of British Army, RUC and British government leaders that they can do so.

Why? Because since British troops first arrived on the streets of Ulster, whatever tactical reforms Britain may have made, it has remained the central plank of capitalist imperialist policy to break the back of the anti-unionist resistance to the prison-house of the Northern state.

For the past two decades or more, wide sections of anti-unionist workers and youth have been at the mercy of the unrelenting and systematic terror of the war policy of British imperialism—lifting, framing, brutalising, torture, mass terror and mass murder. Throughout all of it, indeed even before it, loyalist murder gangs—from the Malvern Street killers of 1966, through the Shankill Butchers of the '70s, to the present day—have acted, with varying measures of support from the forces of the Northern Ireland state, to further terrorise and demoralise the anti-unionist masses.

Therefore the current round of hand wringing, regret and sorrow from the British government, police and army chiefs is the vilest hypocrisy, fooling no-one. Hundreds of RUC men could be mobilised on a Sunday in October to escort a parade of 100 Orangemen around Belfast, but none to protect a Kennedy Way workplace full of anti-unionist workers who were the most likely target for loyalist revenge killings.

It is against such a reality that we need to honestly and fearlessly assess the present widespread calls and campaigns for "peace". No doubt there is a strong feeling of support for the Hume/Adams initiative. Twenty-five years of struggle, with no end in sight, even less of 'victory', has clearly taken its toll of lives and morale among thousands in the anti-unionist communities and workplaces. Moreover the fact that the Republican Movement has presented the Hume-Adams initiative as 'an honourable

compromise' has strengthened the sentiment for 'peace'.

But anti-unionists should be clear that peace as a priority is *not* how either the British or Irish governments see it, let alone Ulster unionists. For a start, the Tory government depends for its life on its deal with the Unionists. Any agreement which made the slightest concession at this moment, however small, to Irish nationalists, will spell the end of Unionist support for Major in parliament, and be used to whip up mass loyalist reaction on the streets.

Furthermore, both the British and Unionists clearly saw in the Hume/Adams initiative a signal that the Republican struggle is in a deep crisis. They reckon, correctly a total victory *may* be within their grasp—that the Republican Movement and the anti-unionist community are prepared to end their resistance, in return for a verbal formula which *acknowledges*—both the Irish right to self-determination but crucially also a loyalist veto. They smell blood!

That is why the British, the unionists, the Irish government, the clergy and the leaders of the ICTU are involved in the most massive peace campaign since the '70s. Its purpose is simple—to delude tens of thousands with the idea that the mood of 'peace' will open up the road to justice and reconciliation, all the better to weaken, marginalize and eventually destroy anti-unionist resistance to the brutality of the northern state itself. The real question that anti-unionist workers should continue to ask is *peace for whom?*

A 'peace' which will leave the British Army, RUC (and loyalist death squads) with their veto? 'Peace' in terms which will leave anti-unionists still 2¹/₂ times more likely to be on the dole while Orange patronage continues unabated? 'Peace' in a society that will remain an economic and social 'black hole', where the wealthy and powerful middle class (Catholics and Protestants) look on while workers are condemned to an endless division among themselves over crumbs?

The fact that tens of thousands of anti-unionists believe there is no other way forward underlines the bankruptcy of Republicanism. Sinn Féin's belief that a few hundred guerrillas, with support from only a minority of anti-unionists could drive out British imperialism, has been cruelly and painfully exposed. Yet, despite the fact that it has failed to win the support of *either* the majority of nationalist workers in the North, hardly any in the South and absolutely none from

the Protestant working class, it has carried on with policies of armed struggle and a bombing campaign whose overall effect has been to deepen and harden the divisions within the Irish working class.

Now, Sinn Féin spokespersons admit, the Protestant working class cannot be bombed into a united Ireland, while week after week the IRA destroys Protestant town centres!

Republicans for years have poured scorn on those who, like the IWG, have consistently argued that any strategy aimed at overthrowing the Northern State must be based on an understanding of the island as a whole being a capitalist system tied into collaboration with British and world capitalist imperialism.

Any strategy needed to begin from the nature and existence of *both* states, and seek to mobilise the Irish working class and oppressed in a fight to the death against *all* aspects of exploitation and oppression—economic, social, political, national.

Such a perspective of mass struggle—for workers' revolution to overthrow both states—held out the sole chance of winning Protestant workers to the goal *not* of Sinn Féin's 'democratic' capitalist Republic, but a workers' republic.

The Republican Movement throughout the last two decades has relentlessly opposed any such perspective of organising among anti-unionists and southern workers as the key to breaking the logjam in the North.

Such a perspective fundamentally challenges Republican illusions that Fianna Fáil and its 'grass roots' would one day be 'won' to the struggle for national unity!

Now the masses face both an onslaught of state and establishment propaganda alongside a loyalist murder campaign while Sinn Féin actions openly suggest that its strategy has failed as it encourages its members and supporters to join the 'peace' initiatives and protests. The results are clear for all to see. Anti-unionists have been rendered politically and physically defenceless. The adventurist attempt by the IRA to wipe out the loyalist 'high command' on the Shankill merely underlined both the desperation and the inadequacy of armed adventures which are no substitute for the mobilisation of the anti-unionist masses.

Local Committees of Resistance

The building of local committees of self-defence is urgently needed.

There is anger as well as frustration among anti-unionists! Many want to see action, no doubt anticipating a Republican response against the loyalist paramilitaries. But such action cannot be a solution to the needs of whole communities and workplaces.

Only self-defence groups, made up of anti-unionist workers and trade unionists with delegates from community groups, political organisations, youth, women and the unemployed etc. can *unite* workplaces and localities and prepare them against further loyalist attacks.

On the basis of such committees specially selected vigilante squads, subject to the control and discipline of each committee, must be trained. Furthermore, in order to co-ordinate actions a centralised leadership must be elected and recallable, to plan and organise mass demonstrations, protests and strikes against every move of either loyalist hit squads or the forces of the state.

We must fight to win support from the trade union movement for every action we take. The bureaucrats of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU will oppose every demand tooth and nail. To resist them (and loyalist control of trade union branches!) we need to create in the South a broad network of support groups among Irish workers and others to provide material, physical and political support to the anti-unionist masses, while simultaneously demanding that the resources of the Irish trade union and labour movement be put at their disposal.

Such measures would, of course, concretely bring the struggle up against the collaborating role of the Irish state and its government. We should demand an end to police and army surveillance on the border, and along with them the repeal of all repressive legislation including Section 31, which keeps the masses ignorant of the real conditions and experience of the northern nationalist ghettos.

In a situation of deepening beleaguering of the anti-unionists we should demand and fight for the building of a mass united front of workers to undertake the task of armed solidarity.

Such an organised democratic mobilisation of solidarity against the Northern State and its loyalist pogromists would have to oppose and undermine the collaborationist role of the Southern state. It would have to demand the opening of the arsenals of the Irish state to equip the committees of self-defence. In such a context it would have to openly encourage the building among soldiers of local committees of support as the key to undermining and breaking the resistance of the officer class.

- No illusions in the illusions of "peace" peddled by our oppressors and class enemies!
- No illusions in the Hume/Adams initiative as any lasting solution!
- For mass democratic committees of self-defence and political action of workers and communities against imperialist repression in Northern Ireland. All armed action to be subject to this democratic control!
- For a united front mobilisation of workers, socialists and republicans throughout the thirty-two counties to fight for these demands.
- For British troops out now, and the disarming and disbanding of the RUC and Royal Irish Regiment!
- For release of all anti-imperialist and socialist fighters jailed for their opposition to the Northern State!

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Irish section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International.

SINN FÉIN

Behind the peace talks

GERRY ADAMS and John Hume seem an unlikely partnership. Hume's constitutional nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) is Sinn Féin's main competitor for the votes of the 40% nationalist minority of Northern Ireland. There is no love lost between them. No issue of Sinn Féin's paper comes off the presses without vitriolic attacks on the SDLP, who are rightly seen as collaborators with the British forces. For its part, the SDLP repeatedly condemns the IRA in the same language used by the Orange bigots and Tones.

But now the SDLP and Sinn Féin are locked in "secret" peace negotiations, which the IRA leadership has publicly welcomed.

The current round of constitutional talks has been grinding on endlessly. There is an inbuilt loyalist veto which, combined with the absence of Sinn Féin, means they were doomed from the start. Frustration with the dead lock has meant that the Hume/Adams proposals have been met sympathetically in some quarters.

Albert Reynolds, the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister), cautiously welcomed the Initiative.

The British government has repeated the official line of no deals with Sinn Féin until they renounce

BY CHRIS BRYANT

violence. But it has refused to denounce the Hume/Adams talks, fueling speculation that the SDLP is acting as their broker in indirect negotiations with Sinn Féin.

Predictably, the loyalist Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) issued a statement threatening to intensify their indiscriminate killing of Catholics in the North, and John Molyneux, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, described the initiative as "lunacy".

But what the Hume/Adams proposals actually contain is far from clear.

In a speech to the Dail (Irish Parliament) Reynolds said that the principles of the process would involve a cessation of all violence and the consent of the unionists to any change in their status.

Proposals

Gerry Adams emphasised a different area of the proposals, the recognition of "the right of Irish people to national self-determination". He refused to use the word "ceasefire" instead talking about a "complete demilitarisation" of the situation.

But the implication is clear. "I would of course be seeking a package which

would allow me to make definitive proposals to the IRA in relation to the future conduct of its campaign." With this Adams tipped the wink to the British government that a ceasefire could be arranged if only Sinn Féin were brought to the negotiating table. He carefully avoided the question of troop withdrawal.

The proposals reportedly do address the question of troop withdrawal—a declaration of Intent to withdraw on a set date "in perhaps 25-30 years time".

Since the Northern-based leadership of Sinn Féin took over from the traditionalist Dublin leadership in the late 1970s, pragmatism rather than ultra-nationalist dogmatism has dominated its politics. This has allowed a long process of "re-definition" of republican strategy within the framework of "broad principles" of self-determination and troop withdrawal.

Last year's Sinn Féin conference marked the biggest retreat so far, clearing the path for the Hume/Adams talks.

Marginalised by the constitutional talks and their electoral stagnation, the leadership started a propagandistic "peace offensive". The manifesto *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* is a vague all-embracing four point plan aimed solely at the



Hume and Adams locked in secret talks

Dublin and London governments.

Nothing is said in the manifesto about the question of troop withdrawal as a pre-condition for negotiations. Nothing is said about how the Protestants of the North can be broken from unionism. Nothing is said about the role of the working class, in the North or South, or in Britain. No road to self-determination is envisaged other than getting Britain to negotiate.

The military campaign, for all of the continued rhetoric about bombing Britain out of Ireland, now has a different aim: to bomb Britain to the negotiating table. The announcement of the Hume/Adams initiative was marked by a series of bombs against economic targets in the North.

Sinn Féin is treading the well worn petit bourgeois nationalist path of betrayal. Its leaders explicitly compare their role with that of the ANC in South Africa or the PLO in Palestine. Negotiations are seen as a victory in themselves, whatever the long-term cost.

"If someone hadn't grasped the nettle in South Africa or in Palestine... Mandela would still be slopping out his cell rather than preparing to be president", commented Adams.

Sinn Féin, despite retaining a mass working class base in the North, does not have anything like the proportion of working class support that the ANC has in South Africa. This is particularly true in the South where electoral support for Sinn Féin stagnates at around two percent while the Labour Party's has grown from 10% to 25% over the last two elections. Adams is no president-in-waiting.

Bloodbath

But in some ways the analogy is apt. The bloodbath that has followed the opening of negotiations in South Africa would be repeated in the North if a settlement was attempted without the disbanding and disarming of loyalist death squads, the abolition of the RUC and the Royal Irish Regiment (formerly the UDR) and the complete withdrawal of British troops. The ANC's truce with South African capitalism is mirrored in Sinn Féin's desire for a pan-nationalist alliance that would include the thoroughly capitalist Fianna Fáil in the South and the openly counter-revolutionary SDLP in the North.

At the moment, however, Adams' peace perspective remains a distant hope. The British government, even if it wanted to build on the Hume/Adams talks, has little room for manoeuvre this side of an election. In a personal deal between John Major and UUP leader Jim Molyneux, Major declared that he stood "four-square for the Union" in return for the support of the nine UUP MPs in July's critical Maasnaught vote. Without the

deal it is unlikely that Major or his government would have survived.

Thus Hume and Adams' unholy alliance has no short-term chance of succeeding. They completely disagree on the most basic question of what national self-determination means. Adams and Sinn Féin favour an all-Ireland referendum and decision by a simple majority whereas Hume argues for separate referendums in the North and the South requiring a majority in each. In practice Hume's proposal means leaving the loyalist veto intact.

Weak

The British government is too weak and divided to move decisively on the Irish question at present and without their co-operation, the initiative means nothing.

The only way to secure a just and lasting peace and a truly independent Ireland is to tear off the blinkers of nationalism. Sinn Féin's ditching of any commitment to "socialism", its pathetic pleading with the Tories and Fianna Fáil lays bare the real limitations of petit bourgeois nationalism, no matter how militant or militarist.

Nevertheless, the struggle for Irish self-determination is a just struggle which every British worker should support. It is British bosses and their collaborators in the South who are responsible for carving up the Irish nation and creating the conditions for the war. The British working class has a vested interest in standing "four-square" with the Irish resistance against the British state regardless of the policies of its leaders.

To end the war a solution has to be put forward that goes beyond the nationalist interests of this or that group of bosses, or the middle class elements who are the backbone of the Sinn Féin leadership.

It means fighting not only against national oppression but also against the economic system that breeds it. It means linking the immediate national and economic aspirations of the masses through to the abolition of private property itself, creating the chance of breaking a section of Protestant workers from their own exploiters.

Only a socialist programme, which subordinates the armed struggle to the political mobilisation and defence of the working class can guide the anti-unionist workers to a progressive rejection of the proposed sell out. Nothing short of a socialist united Ireland as part of a Socialist United States of Europe can guarantee lasting peace.

Adams' strategy, like Mandela's and Arafat's, can only lead to the oppressed masses paying for yet another imperialist solution. ■

Loyalist death squads

LOYALIST MURDER squads are working overtime in Northern Ireland to terrorise the Catholic population into submission. When the British press bothers to report this at all it presents a picture of a tit-for-tat tragedy on all sides, with the only difference between republicans and loyalists being the body count.

But the fact remains that, with very few exceptions, the IRA targets security forces and those who service them. Loyalist death squads, in contrast, have an explicit policy of indiscriminate murder.

In an interview with a British journalist, one UFF commander explained their strategy: "We are out to terrorise the terrorists. To get to the stage when old grannies up the Falls Road will call on the IRA to stop, because it is ordinary Catholics that are getting hit, not the Provos behind steel doors."

The reality is that the loyalist commanders do not want the IRA to stop. They want history to stop, and turn back to the days when Catholics, like black people in the Southern USA, were too frightened to claim even the meagre legal rights to work and vote allocated to them by the state.

Thus one of the latest attacks targeted a group of Catholic workers at Shorts' Aircraft factory. Under pressure from the USA to meet elementary equal opportunity policies, the fiercely loyalist Shorts passes had begun to allow in some Catholic sub-contractors. This was good for publicity and at the same

time ensured that the relative job security of Protestant workers and the pro-loyalist culture of the core workforce was not undermined.

The UFF had different ideas. On 12 October it sprayed a vanload of eight Catholic painters with automatic fire, killing father of five Jody Reynolds and injuring five others. That day all Catholic workers left the industrial estate where Shorts is situated, some reportedly vowing not to return.

The next day there was a walk out by 1000 Protestant and Catholic workers at Shorts in opposition to this sectarian killing.

As always the security forces have proved worse than useless in preventing loyalist attacks.

The same firm of painters which was riddled with bullets last month had to face a sustained campaign of verbal abuse from police detailed to guard the entrance to Belfast harbour estate in the months before the killing. "Fenian bastards" was how police referred to the sub-contractors—the loyalist killers only turned that sentiment into action.

The rising wave of loyalist violence places high on the agenda the need for organised, mass self-defence of the anti-unionist working class. That is something the IRA's guerrilla strategy constantly rejects. According to this strategy, it is the Volunteers who will "decide where and when to strike", and the anti-unionist masses have only the ballot, not the bullet, as an immediate solution.

A recent interview in *Republican News* revealed the hollowness of the IRA's response to these attacks.

"Many in the nationalist community are living in fear of these attacks. What is the IRA's response?" asked the interviewer.

Whilst correctly documenting British collusion with the death squads, and warning against individual sectarian tit-for-tat responses, the IRA could offer nothing more than a promise to take out individual UFF leaders. This is only half an answer, and the IRA leaders know it. That is what lies behind their call for "utmost discipline".

Nowhere does the IRA advocate organised mass self-defence. Sinn Féin should organise self-defence patrols and should call on the Catholic workers who support the SDLP to do likewise. They and their leaders are no longer safe from the UDA/UFF since they have been targeted indiscriminately as a "pan-nationalist bloc".

Such self-defence organisations were a spontaneous feature of the revolutionary upsurge of the struggle in the early 1970s. If created they would bring the anti-unionist masses and their leaders into immediate conflict with the British state, which could not tolerate them for a moment. British repression would have to be met with mass strike action, demonstrations and an appeal to the whole trade union movement, including the British unions, for support.

That is not an easy strategy to follow. But it is easier than sitting as a defenceless target, secure only in the knowledge that somewhere, someday, someone else will exact revenge for your death. ■

Irish republicanism at an impasse

It is twenty five years since the civil rights revolt gave birth to the modern IRA. Here, Matt Docherty assesses republicanism's strategy for a united Ireland today in the light of the recent historic changes in world politics

Unlike many radical nationalist forces around the world, the Irish Republican Movement¹ has been neither demoralised nor disoriented by the collapse of the "socialist" countries or the junking of Stalinist ideology.²

The main reformulation of tactics and ideology has been due to the increasingly negative balance sheet of a 25 year long struggle within Ireland and Britain. The revolt of the oppressed minority against the British-guaranteed oppressor state in Northern Ireland is ever more isolated. But in rationalising this state of affairs and in posing new solutions to it, there is evidence that the retreat and even capitulation of petit-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist movements in other parts of the world has effected Irish republicanism.³

Only in the 1960s did Stalinism establish an influence in the openly organised party of the movement, Sinn Féin. Attempts by Stalinists in the mid 1930s to draw worker members of the IRA into a left-wing block were repudiated by the conspiratorial leaders of the IRA who consistently asserted their anti-communism right up to the end of the 1950s.

For three decades this "Republican Movement" was little more than a tiny illegal armed conspiracy engaging in sporadic guerrilla actions with no mass support. Although they could occasionally win localised electoral support in the South, refusal to take up seats was a sacred principle.

During the 1960s the IRA re-created Sinn Féin as a small but open campaigning political party among sections of radicalised youth in both parts of the country. They responded to the new conditions of secularisation and international investment in Ireland by abandoning their explicitly Catholic nationalist, anti-communist baggage. They adopted a left-wing posture against imperialist capitalism. The small Stalinist Communist Party of Ireland hoped to guide the new republican movement into a popular alliance for democracy and civil rights north and south, embracing electoral politics.

In 1968-69 an explosion of popular nationalist revolt among the half-million Catholics trapped in the north split the

Republican Movement. For the first time in 50 years republicans were faced with popular nationalist support for armed action against the sectarian state which systematically oppressed them.⁴

The republicans split into "Official" and "Provisional" wings early in 1970. The Provisionals split was ostensibly over an IRA decision to end the 50-year-old boycott of the Southern parliament but it was the conflict over how to respond to the nationalist revolt which really mattered. It was this split which was to keep the republican movement of today out of Stalinist control.

The Provisional IRA in 1969-72 grew rapidly in conditions of mass demonstrations against the Loyalist state⁴ which had interned hundreds of republican and socialist campaigners. They developed as a defence militia in local nationalist communities which they in part protected from Protestant loyalist gangs and uniformed state thugs.

The discredited Official IRA ceased all military action and attacked the Provisional IRA as anti-democratic, religious-sectarian and "fascist". Developing as an electoralist Stalinist party, they expelled the remaining anti-imperialist elements in their own ranks who wanted to combine class struggle with continued anti-imperialist struggle in the north. Eventually they built a small base of support among white-collar trade unionists and became "The Workers Party".

They became notorious for supporting state repression against their former republican comrades. It was left to them not Sinn Féin to declare the Stalinist states to be bastions of socialism.

This bitter and occasionally bloody split was a major setback for Stalinist ideology within the present republican movement. Since then the republican movement has established a relative independence of Stalinism.

Nor did the republicans' military wing suffer by the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, for these were never a significant supplier of weapons or funds. A major source of funds has always been nationalist sympathisers among emigré Irish communities in the USA. IRA volunteers were never schooled in Moscow like those of the FMLN.



As for arms, in the mid 1980s Libya alone supplied at least two ships full—much more than IRA guerrilla units had the capacity to use. Subsequent police seizures of sophisticated automatic weapons had little effect on the IRA campaign because its major activity has been to cause havoc by planting bombs and to attack police stations with its own 'mortars' rather than engage in raids or gun-attacks, like those of guerrilla movements in Latin America.

For all of its 150 years republicanism in Ireland has been a petit-bourgeois party rooted among the Catholic masses. Apart from the period of the armed popular front of 1919-21 this current (Fenianism, IRB and finally IRA/Sinn Féin) has always been hated and vilified by reformist bourgeois Catholic nationalism.

Petit-bourgeois republicanism has therefore always claimed to champion "the men of no property" as against the propertied nationalist ruling class. The republican programme has never been for socialism but rather strived for an idealised self-sufficient Irish society of citizens relating to each other as small property-holders. It would mitigate class antagonisms rather than pursue the struggle of classes to their final abolition. It is a programme little different from that of a hundred radical nationalist movements across the globe in this century.⁵

But despite this petit-bourgeois programme the provisional movement's reliance after the 1971 split upon the largely working class nationalist ghettos in the North obliged them to create a new "socialist" rhetoric.

This was forced on them by the sharp increase in unemployment and social misery arising out of the 1974 recession. By 1978 the new generation of northern republican activists were turning Sinn Féin leftwards, taking over its national weekly and displacing the traditionalist leadership based in the South.

The new current eventually installed Gerry Adams as a "left-wing" leader of the movement. In 1979 in a significant turn for Sinn Féin, Adams declared:

"The task that we, as republicans, have set ourselves, and the ills affecting our people and our country are too complex to be satisfied merely by a British withdrawal or by the establishment of a 32-county neo-colonial Free State. We are not, and never have been, merely a "Brits Out" movement . . . We stand opposed to all forms and all manifestations of imperialism and capitalism. We stand for an Ireland free, united, socialist and Gaelic . . . Our movement needs constructive and thoughtful self-criticism. . . . It needs to be done now because to date our most glaring weakness lies in our failure to develop revolutionary politics and to build an alternative to so-called constitutional politics".⁶

British and Irish bourgeois propaganda seized upon such left-wing rhetoric in order to associate the IRA with communism. They hoped to undermine support for the IRA among their right-wing Irish-American sympathisers. Adams countered truthfully: "There is no Marxist influence within Sinn Féin. It simply isn't a Marxist organisation. I know of no one in Sinn Féin who is a Marxist or who would be influenced by Marxism"⁷

Adams and the Sinn Féin lefts were adamant that there could be no struggle for "socialism" until first they had won "national liberation". This outlook dictated their attitude to nationalist revolutionary victories in Nicaragua (1979) and Zimbabwe (1981) which were hailed uncritically by Sinn Féin. There was no recognition that the continued extremes of social inequality among the workers and poor peasants in those countries necessitated a continuation of the social and class struggle and to challenge the capitalist basis of their societies.⁸

Despite having its only concentrated bases of support among the most oppressed urban nationalist communities in Northern Ireland, it has remained both politically and socially petit-bourgeois in character and leadership.

Self-consciously working class organisations have never adhered to Sinn Féin. Even the weight of the urban bases of support in the north is counter-balanced in Sinn Féin by its rural and urban petit-bourgeois support scattered throughout the country and among emigrants in the US. For

Sinn Féin versus IRA?

Many actions of the IRA in recent years have outraged the working class and masses throughout Ireland and Britain by killing random passers-by and, occasionally, deliberately killing Protestant civilians. Sinn Féin leaders openly criticised some of the most damaging IRA actions. Endless speculation about a potential split in the movement, however, has come to nothing. Events seem to confirm that the IRA and its "physical-force" strategy remain decisive within the republican movement as a whole.

Sinn Féin remains an open, legal and formally democratic party selling about 30,000 copies of its weekly paper. Though censored in the broadcast media, and denied municipal halls for its meetings, its conferences are open to the press. The deep reluctance of the ruling class to suppress this party reflects the reality that it is not simply a front for the IRA but a political current with a limited mass base in the North and a minority current throughout Ireland. It has a political life of its own on many fronts, but is tied to the IRA by defining its political essence in terms

of the "strategy" of the physical-force struggle. For Sinn Féin to reject the IRA would be to dissolve itself completely.

The SDLP and leading churchmen at present seeking to exploit the republicans' own rhetoric about peace have no way of knowing whether now, or ever, the IRA can be persuaded, through Sinn Féin, that a ceasefire will eventually be rewarded with a place at the "negotiating table".

The IRA remains firmly set on inflicting the maximum possible physical damage on the British state until such time as Britain declares its intention to end its sovereignty. Only if their passive support in the most oppressed ghettos is undermined will the IRA "suspend" their campaign. The legacy of 25 years of brutal conflict, however, suggest that such a development is extremely unlikely.

As well as the many killed and wounded in the conflict, countless nationalists have been "convicted" and jailed, or even remanded for years pending trials which never took place. Juries are abolished. Legal procedures are routinely perverted to exonerate uniformed thugs while putting away republican suspects with no real

evidence for long prison terms. Two prisoners are now in their 21st year in prison—longer than 'life' sentences for other 'criminals' in the British system. There are 600 IRA members in prison at present, mostly on long sentences. They represent several generations of youth who have been drawn into the struggle since 1968.

Surveillance and harassment is the constant lot of nationalists, with frequent police and army raids on homes, wrecking them and dragging away "suspects" for interrogation. Mobilised uniformed forces currently amount to 19,100 military and 12,900 police—one army or RUC member for every four nationalist males of active age, and expected to increase. The pretence of the British Army that it came to enforce peace between nationalists and loyalists in 1969 was discredited within a year. But loyalist terrorist attacks have never ceased and are a significant reason for continued support for the IRA.

Among the most oppressed sections of nationalists, hostility to the Northern state and British Army is more entrenched and bitter than ever. Community divisions are deeper than ever.

In such conditions almost no action that the IRA might take could be so self-defeating as to finally undermine this core of support. ●

all these reasons conscious Stalinists made few gains within the new "left turn" of Sinn Féin.

The gun and the bomb remain the fundamental defining point of Irish republican "strategy" which thus allows a considerable eclecticism in its social and political positions. All its assessments of other guerrilla struggles and nationalist insurrections around the world are principally concerned to emphasise that self-sacrifice in armed struggle is ultimately victorious, that victory belongs to those who are prepared to suffer the most.

Gradually, however, "victory" in the armed struggle has come to be re-defined not as forcing Britain to leave Ireland but . . . winning a place at the negotiating table! Negotiations are seen as a "victory" for armed struggle not only in Ireland but in El Salvador and South Africa.⁹ After the killing in South Africa of Chris Hani and with the ANC still utterly opposed to organising democratic defence militias, Sinn Féin stridently supported the ANC's strategy of collaboration, now that the "victory" of negotiations had been won:

"Like Mandela and the other ANC leaders, [Hani] rec-

ognised the need for the combination of political agitation and armed struggle to force the Pretoria government to the negotiating table. Like all great revolutionary leaders, he recognised the value of military action but was not afraid to suspend the tactic of armed struggle to accept the new challenge presented by inclusive talks . . . Irish politicians . . . who this week called for the continuation of these talks, are hypocrites. It is these same politicians who have contributed to the continuation of the war in Ireland and the terrible suffering on all sides which this entails by refusing to agree to all-inclusive talks."¹⁰

For all its "revolutionary" intransigence and commitment to the "physical force" struggle, Sinn Féin and the IRA have no perspective whatever of smashing the oppressor-state of imperialist capitalism in the north of Ireland.

The minimum revolutionary democratic demands which any mass struggle must impose as pre-conditions for ending national oppression in the Six County state are the withdrawal of British forces and the disarming and disbanding of the sectarian police (Royal Ulster Constabulary) and army reserve (Royal Irish Regiment¹¹). Sinn Féin, however, does

not raise these demands as preconditions for a solution, and certainly not as a focus for any kind of mass struggle. Their "strategy" is to extract from Britain a "declaration of intent to withdraw" and to win admission into all-party negotiations on future political arrangements.

Towards this end they now engage in a propagandistic "peace" offensive. Their 1992 Conference ratified the leadership's manifesto *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* which sets out in the most moderate terms all the well-rehearsed bourgeois arguments for "an Irish national democracy":

"Sinn Féin believes that such a scenario is achievable based on the following;

1) the recognition by the British government that the Irish people have the right to national self-determination.

2) That the British government change its current policy to one of ending participation and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government whose selection would be a democratic matter for the Irish people.

3) That the future of the unionists lies in this context and that the British government has a responsibility to influence unionist attitudes.

4) The London and Dublin governments should consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of ending partition.

These four propositions, if enacted by the British and Irish governments, would secure for the peace process the maximum national, international, political and popular support."¹²

Failing acceptance of this by Britain, Sinn Féin calls on the "other nationalist parties", Fianna Fáil in the South the SDLP¹³ in the North, to "forcefully and continuously represent the interests of the nationalist people", including appeals to the EC, the CSCE and the UN.

Even if Sinn Féin were admitted into political talks, what prospect is there of Britain ever "putting on the table" the question of Irish Unity? Is it conceivable that Britain might repudiate its guarantee to the Protestant Unionist population of continued British rule?

In the late seventeenth century it was the Protestant industrialists of the North East region who championed the fight for Irish freedom from Britain's stifling commercial restrictions. Britain and the Irish landlords combined to drown in blood the United Irishmen's bourgeois revolution in 1798 and force Ireland fully into the United Kingdom.

A century later industry had declined throughout the South where famine, landlordism and anti-Catholic discrimination gave rise to two new nationalist movements—the constitutional Catholic nationalists fighting in the UK parliament for Irish Home Rule, and the "physical-force" Fenians, precursors of the IRA. Only in the North East did industry not decline, rather it thrived as a supplier to the British Empire's shipping and military needs.

As the north-east developed industrially in the 19th century, the mushrooming urban proletariat was ghettoised along religious lines. The quasi-masonic Orange Order¹⁴ united northern Irish Protestants across all classes in an alliance with a semi-racist attitude to the Catholic Irish. Po-



groms against Catholic working class areas were a regular part of Orange triumphalism.

"Unionism" as the hegemonic political party developed within this reactionary class alliance of Protestants, determined to defend the Union with Britain against any concession to Home Rule for the nationalists.

The Home Rule Bill of 1912 was the signal for the Unionists to mobilise and arm the whole Protestant population in readiness to resist Irish independence. With the outbreak of war, Home Rule was shelved and the Unionists were promised a division of the island to allow for continued British sovereignty.

Historically the British nation-state, in its formation, failed to integrate the Irish people in either the South or the North-East, as it had done successfully with the Welsh and the Scots. Thus Irish Protestants in the North-East were given a separate Northern Ireland parliament in 1921 even though they had never demanded it nor argued for any form of "self-determination". They defined their identity as British, or more specifically as the Irish people within the Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

Despite this attempt to claim the same position as the Scots and the Welsh, they remained completely outside of British political and social life. So, for example, the mainland Labour, Conservative or Liberal parties never organised in Northern Ireland. Although it was formally only one of four national regions under London's rule, it was the only one with a parliament of its own. It was allowed to impose a permanent state of emergency, to mobilise an exclusively Protestant uniformed militia, and to apply draconian repressive legislation and formal discrimination against Catholics without any scrutiny by London.

Despite this failure of integration, some sections of the British ruling class (not least the aristocracy and monarchy) are still influenced by the historical connections with the north of Ireland. This burden of history, of course, weighs ever more lightly on the British state today but still gives force to Unionist demands on the British ruling class to maintain sovereignty over their Irish enclave.

Economically and strategically, however, it has been evident to the British ruling class at least since the 1960s that they had no interest in maintaining sovereignty over any part of Ireland. Indeed, Britain approved the opening-up of relations between North and South which was attempted in 1965 and which encouraged both the Civil Rights movement and the plebeian loyalist reaction which sparked the present prolonged conflict.

The present British Secretary for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, aroused loyalist indignation in April 1993 when he told the Hamburg newspaper *Die Zeit*:

"Many people believe that we would not want to release Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. To be entirely honest we would, with pleasure! — no, not with pleasure. I take that back. But we would not stand in the way of Northern Ireland, if that would be the will of the majority. . . . The province costs us £3 billion per year. Three billion pounds for one-and-a-half million people! None of our strategic or economic interests are at stake there. But as long as the majority wishes to remain in the United Kingdom, we will pay £3 billion without complaining".

The public expenditure programme in Northern Ireland is £7.5 billion. Less than half of this comes from taxes levied in the province. In 1990 the subvention from Britain was at least £2bn. It may currently be £3bn as Mayhew states, though it is likely to be more. In fact Northern Ireland costs Britain far more. The "security" costs of the conflict amount to another £3bn annually, covering RUC, RIR, Army, political prisoners and compensation for damage.¹⁵

"Northern Ireland was financially unviable from the start. It was unable to pay the Imperial Contribution fixed by the British at partition. This was supposed to cover Northern Ireland's share of UK-wide expenditure on defence and maintaining a diplomatic service.

The severity of the unemployment crisis in the 1920s and early 1930s, coupled with the costs of criminal injuries and policing in the aftermath of partition, led to the waiving of the contribution and an acceptance that Northern Ireland could not pay its way. This was further institutionalised in the Social Services Agreement Act of 1949 under which Britain guaranteed to underwrite the costs of the British welfare state in Northern Ireland."¹⁶

Mayhew can scarcely conceal Britain's impatience with the Unionists. But he will be long dead and buried before the Unionists of Northern Ireland willingly consent to Irish unity! Another 20 years of the present political violence will be costly to the British state—though it has distinct advantages for the honing of Britain's repressive apparatus.

But it would be a small cost indeed compared to the political consequences of simply abandoning the Unionists—even with years of advance notice by Britain of its "intent to withdraw".

The only progressive basis on which Britain might unilaterally leave Ireland would require the disarming and disbanding of the local regiment and police. Otherwise bloody civil war would erupt within a heartland of imperialism, with no guarantee that it would not lead to the breakup of bourgeois order entirely within all of Ireland. Such a "neutralising" of armed loyalist reaction in Ireland, however, is a pipe-dream.

An alternative "solution" from above is actively discussed among constitutional nationalists. It is to work towards European sovereignty over Northern Ireland within the as yet unformed European Union. Such a perspective knits well with the general reactionary current within Europe for a "Europe of the regions". John Hume of the SDLP, himself a leading political figure within EC institutions, has often argued for such a solution. Though rejected by Unionists it is not as unpalatable as all-Ireland institutions. It is conceivable that by promising to remove British sovereignty as such, a European offer to implement such an arrangement might be sufficient to persuade Irish republicanism to suspend its armed campaign.

This swapping of sovereignty, if it were practicable, offers no more guarantee of dissolving the inequalities and sectarian character of the Northern Ireland state than any other solution from above. Its practical implementation would require some kind of federation within Ireland. This would leave intact much of the sectarian Protestant character of the northern state and the confessional Catholic character of the southern one—exactly as has been suggested by Fianna Fáil.

Decisive in the long-term for any such alternative must be the fate of European capitalism. Northern Ireland has suffered an industrial decline worse than any other region of the UK, leaving more than half its citizens dependent on UK social security or other forms of direct government aid. Unemployment is officially (i.e. at least) 14%. Average standards of living are among the lowest in the UK. And all of these indicators are far worse for the Catholic masses than for Protestants.

For example, unemployment is proportionately twice as high among the former. Without a major economic uplift, requiring massive inward investment, the material foundations for sectarianism and national oppression will continue to be reinforced.

Nationalism retains considerable force in the politics of the Republic, still drawing on historic traditions of struggle, but sustained also by the awareness of Irish society as "underdeveloped" and haemorrhaging through emigration and the draining of surplus value. Certainly the "aspiration for Irish unity" is almost universally shared in the South, but only at high points of the struggle in the North has it led to mass protest or attempts at solidarity in the South, as in 1969¹⁷, 1972 and 1981.

Apart from rural areas along the border with Northern Ireland the Southern masses have experienced nothing of the social oppression of Northern Catholics on the basis of

their nationality. For fifty years, the southern bourgeoisie showed no more concern for the denial of the civil rights of Northern Catholics than their counterparts in London.

Fianna Fáil, always the largest bourgeois party with between 40% and 55% of the popular vote, has monopolised the limited force of southern nationalism and consistently neutralised any progressive potential in it for resistance to imperialism. The Republican Movement has helped it do this by preferring to appeal for "pan-nationalist unity" rather than struggle against the semi-colonial bourgeoisie.

But what of recent economic developments in the North and South? Have they given rise to a greater or lesser integration between the two halves of a divided island? In short, does the southern Irish bourgeoisie have an objective inter-

est in a united Ireland to enlarge the sphere of its exploitation?

In economic terms, both states are faced with growing marginalisation within Europe. Once the Channel Tunnel is in operation, Ireland as a whole will be the only member country not connected by road or rail to the markets of the European Union. This is a growing disadvantage for exporters from Ireland and a disincentive to inward manufacturing investment. Most industrial exports from Ireland today are based on foreign capital attracted by the combination of EEC membership and relatively low costs. All that is under threat in the expanded and more integrated European Union.

The southern bourgeoisie likes to remind the Unionists that by remaining part of the UK the North is denied

Sinn Féin and the Ballot Box

The historical experience of Irish republicanism hardened its fundamental distrust of "politics". They believed that taking seats in constitutional bodies would quickly undermine the "real" struggle—with arms in hand. Their belief was well founded. As a radical petit-bourgeois movement they have never had a conception of class-struggle politics nor any social programme that fundamentally challenged bourgeois society.

Quite rightly, they could not trust themselves to consistently struggle against imperialism and the semi-colonial bourgeoisie in councils and parliaments. Hence they split fundamentally over this issue in 1926 (IRA versus Fianna Fáil) and again in 1970 (Provisionals versus Officials).

When Sinn Féin "moved left" after 1979 the new leaders around Gerry Adams openly argued that the IRA struggle could not be victorious on its own. Engagement in popular campaigns and economic struggles was proclaimed to be essential for the republican movement to win the mass support necessary to make victory possible. Without the slightest conception of an action programme of class struggle, however, this "left" orientation bore no fruit whatever for Sinn Féin. Electoralism was in practice what "winning mass support" came down to.

Under Adams' leadership the shallow reformist "socialism" of the late 1970s gave way to vigorous electoralism in the 1980s. The republican victory was now to be achieved "with an Armalite in

one hand and a ballot-box in the other".

The turn to electoral politics as a necessary supplement to armed struggle evolved during the 1979-81 H-Block Campaign. Sinn Féin had often contested elections in the past but never taken their seats in parliaments or local councils. Hunger-striking prisoners contested general elections in Britain and the Republic from their prison cells. Bobby Sands was elected as a Westminster MP in April 1981 (until his death in May) and two more were elected to the Dáil in Dublin in June. Westminster hit back with the Sands Bill which made it impossible for a "convict" in future to stand for election. In the local council elections in the North in the same period Sinn Féin called for a boycott, only to see most of its own supporters vote for the SDLP.

Sinn Féin capitalised on the H-Block mobilisations and decided to take its seats in local councils in future. It adopted a vigorous electoral policy and in June 1985 won 40% of the nationalist vote in the North in local elections, a major propaganda victory for a movement dismissed as criminals and terrorists by the ruling class in both islands. Since then its elected councillors have certainly been tribunes of the oppressed nationalists, suffering constant abuse and many of them assassinated by loyalist death squads—but in no sense socialist councillors.

The watershed for Sinn Féin's electoralism was when the party decided to end its abstentionism towards the parliament of the Republic,

In November 1986, exactly a year after the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and obviously under pressure of the new ruling class strategy. Abstentionism was the issue which had split the republican movement in 1970. This time the IRA was agreed on the "strategy" of combining "the armalite and the ballot-box", so the only fall-out was a minor breakaway of traditionalists from the political wing¹.

What was different in 1986 was that the republican movement was at a temporary peak of support among northern nationalists, in the wake of the H-Block struggles. And at the same time the guerrilla campaign had been sustained unbroken for 16 years. The IRA was confident that a turn to "political" struggle would supplement, not undermine, the armed struggle.

Since then, however, in none of four general elections in the Republic has Sinn Féin come remotely near winning a single seat. Indeed, their electoral support throughout the South has remained about 2%, over a period when the Irish Labour Party increased its vote from 10% to 25%.

In 1983 Gerry Adams was elected a Westminster MP but did not take his seat. This propaganda gain for Sinn Féin might have been far more significant had he attempted to use the House of Commons as a platform. Sinn Féin still applies its moralistic abstentionism to the London parliament, but Adams lost his seat to the SDLP in the 1992 General Election when Protestant loyalists mobilised to tactically vote for the SDLP candidate to unseat Sinn Féin. ●

¹ Ruairi O Brádaigh's marginal Republican Sinn Féin.

access to the relatively huge European funds earmarked for the less developed countries. Thus the Republic is about to receive £8bn of European funds over five years, equal to a 4% increase in annual GNP.

Economic and political co-operation across the island is seen as an important factor in offsetting increased marginalisation of both economies. This strengthens the argument for a European solution to the partition of Ireland. The creation of a single "island economy" for Ireland within Europe has recently been advocated by a leading banker. It focuses on unifying the banking and capital investment sectors north and south to offset the migration of capital due to the dominance of London over the two separate capital markets within Ireland. It envisages the development of an "economic corridor" along the east coast linking the two capital cities. Of course, this would be at the further expense of severe regional inequality within Ireland, but for Irish capitalism as a whole it is an attractive possibility.¹⁸

Beyond perspectives for economic co-operation, however, the ruling class of the Republic has no compelling economic interest in Irish unity. It is far more concerned with the most thoroughgoing European unity as the only basis for its own continued rule.¹⁹

Like the British, the Republic's principal concern with Northern Ireland is the negative impact of the conflict on the economy, discouraging tourism and investment in Ireland and adding almost 1% of GNP to the annual security bill in the South. For 35 years the southern ruling class has modernised the Irish economy on the basis of attracting foreign capital and integrating into the EC.

Although this has produced a small number of indigenous monopolies which now export capital, and a strong indigenous commercial agriculture, the predominance of foreign capital and finance guarantees that the economy remains overall semi-colonial. The majority of indigenous capitalists have no perspective of developing in competition with international capital but survive increasingly through linkages with it.²⁰

The ground for Irish unity is not being prepared by economic developments in Ireland as a whole. The Irish bourgeoisie has no economic or political interest in leading such a struggle. Nevertheless, this has not deterred Sinn Féin from placing the "pan-nationalist front" at the centre of their political strategy at least since 1979 and the mass campaign for political status for Republican H-Block. Gerry Adams turned that campaign into a humanitarian plea to the Catholic clergy, the SDLP and Fianna Fáil to save the lives of the prisoners when they went on hunger strike.

When Bobby Sands died on hunger strike in May 1981, the campaign leaders refused to call for working class action but told the mass demonstrations that they were "giving Fianna Fáil and the Catholic Church one more chance" to intervene to save the lives of the other hunger strikers. The prisoners were left to die, one after another, and the campaign went down to terrible defeat.

Still preferring the reactionary dream of "all nationalists together" over the fight for working class action, Sinn Féin repeated the same method in the fight against extradition of republicans caught in the South for alleged actions in the North and Britain. Far from winning any new friends among "constitutional" nationalists, however, the IRA gave an excuse to Fianna Fáil to support the Extradition Bill, which up till then Fianna Fáil had been obstructing, when they massacred Protestant civilians in the bombing of Enniskillen in November 1987.

Undeterred, Adams continued to argue that Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin nationalists have a historic common interest, that the 1926 split of Sinn Féin into constitutional Fianna Fáil and revolutionary IRA was tragic and unnecessary. They were "separated brethren", to repeat his ecclesiastical metaphor.

Coming at a moment when Fianna Fáil was inflicting savage austerity measures on the poor, the sick and the aged, such cant from a self-styled "socialist republican" leader did nothing to win support for Sinn Féin among the masses. Nor did it elicit an iota of response from the "separated brethren". On the contrary, it has served simply to make Sinn Féin itself increasingly vulnerable to ruling class diplomacy.

The SDLP's John Hume is now determined to exploit this fact, hoping to inveigle Sinn Féin into calling for an IRA ceasefire. John Hume, has broken ranks with all the establishment parties in both islands and engaged in talks with Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams. Hume claims he is treating seriously the Sinn Féin propaganda for "peace". He hopes to create diplomatic conditions for them to eventually call a ceasefire.

Hume tried a similar tactic of public debate with Adams—without any result—in 1988 before the Unionists agreed to the recent round of talks. This time his manoeuvre has provoked much deeper outrage among the Unionists. For, the two leaders went so far as to issue a joint statement on 24 April, insisting that there could be no solution merely on the basis of internal arrangements in Northern Ireland.

In other words, new all-Ireland institutions in some form would have to be accepted by the Unionists. Especially, shocking to the governments in Dublin and London was Hume's agreement to what is usually regarded as a utopian republican principle:

"We accept that the Irish people as a whole have a right to self-determination".

On the other hand, they declared:

"As leaders of our respective parties, we have told each other that we see the task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all on this island as our primary challenge. We both recognise that such a new agreement is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island, by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation."

At one level, Hume's tactic may have been geared to win his party more nationalist support in the May 1993 local council elections throughout the province. But it has a deeper significance. This bourgeois nationalist leader has supported state repression of republicans for 25 years.

By letting it be seen that he is talking with Sinn Féin, he is subtly reminding Britain, Dublin and the Unionists of the alternative possibility of a "pan-nationalist front" of radical and constitutional nationalists. Hume himself has no intention of creating any such alliance with republicans; his purpose is to put pressure on the two governments to stick with the strategy of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But Sinn Féin will foster the illusion that this latest pan-national alliance actually leads to meaningful negotiations with Sinn Féin, British withdrawal and a united Ireland.

The pleading, rationalist posture by Sinn Féin towards the Irish and British ruling classes invites ridicule. In practice, however, it is an argument made not with words but IRA bombs.

The political tragedy is thus twofold. First, terrible sacrifices are being exacted for an empty set of utopian

shibboleths which could only conceivably be granted by the ruling classes in a reactionary form from above. Plainly, Sinn Féin is arguing not for the "socialist republic" which it mouths to its followers, but for an unrealisable bourgeois united Ireland, to be agreed by the ruling classes, as the key to "peace with justice".

Secondly, the mass of the Irish working class, especially the Protestant working class, and even Sinn Féin's own limited mass support, are systematically alienated and divided or at best rendered totally passive by the guerrilla campaign.

All socialists and class conscious workers recognise that the IRA are a product of a justified anti-imperialist resistance to an army of occupation; in any conflict with this army workers must desire the victory of the IRA. Likewise, their prisoners and activists must be defended unconditionally against the actions of the security forces. Our criticisms levelled here have nothing in common with the reactionary at-

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

In 1985 British Prime Minister Thatcher signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement with the Dublin government, guaranteeing to consult the Southern nationalist regime at regular conferences about the internal affairs of Northern Ireland.

The aim was to pressure northern nationalists and Unionists to agree some form of local power sharing. Why?

The British ruling class is far from making any concession to Irish national self-determination. But it does aim to restore stable rule in Northern Ireland. To this end it needs to create formal equal rights for both "communities" or "traditions" within its six Irish counties. Between 1973 and 1984 Britain created no less than three elected assemblies in Belfast, each with the mission to produce a form of power-sharing between the bourgeois-nationalist SDLP and the major Unionist parties. Within months, each attempt was shipwrecked on the rocks of Unionist (or more exactly plebeian Loyalist) intransigence.

That is why Thatcher was prepared to antagonise the Unionist leaders by setting up a permanent consultation with the Dublin Government in November 1985. This strengthened the bargaining position of the SDLP in future negotiations. Strengthening the position of the SDLP and promoting the interests of the Catholic middle class

was also seen as a pre-condition for defeating the IRA. The Unionist parties would be denied any regional organ of government until such time as they made concessions.

It took five years for this manoeuvre to produce talks among the parties in Northern Ireland. An elaborate diplomatic formula for talks was worked out. There were to be separate discussions on three fronts, concerned with arrangements between the two governments, arrangements within Northern Ireland, and arrangements within Ireland as a whole. The latter, the "all-Ireland dimension" has always been fundamental to the SDLP and anathema to the Unionists even though it has never been intended as anything more than North-South consultation and practical co-operation (directed mostly against the IRA).

For republicans the decisive feature of the 1991-92 talks was that Sinn Féin was excluded! Throughout the period of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, therefore, the republican movement has, on the one hand, focussed its propaganda on the demand to be included in the negotiations, and on the other hand, stepped up its guerrilla campaign in the North and in Britain.

Talks were postponed during the 1992 UK General Election campaign. Attempts to revive them seem to have

definitely failed by spring 1993 with the refusal of the Unionist parties to cooperate. The Unionists have turned the tables on Irish bourgeois nationalism in one respect by insisting that first, the Irish Republic must get rid of its claim to sovereignty over the Six Counties, from its 1937 Constitution. The Southern bourgeois parties, after all, have for 20 years insisted that Irish unity can be brought about only by consent of the Unionists. Why not, then, show "goodwill" by removing the formal legal claim to sovereignty over the North embodied in Articles Two and Three of the Constitution!

Within the nationalist Fianna Fáil party, in government in the South since 1987, such a demand is resented by "grass-roots" sections as a capitulation to the historic enemy of Irish national self-determination. Fianna Fáil may have no choice, however, but to alter the Republic's claim over the North, probably reducing it to a statement of "aspiration for peaceful unification by consent". For, it now depends on coalition with the Labour Party to stay in government. Labour leaders have explicitly committed themselves to compromise with the Unionists.

Sinn Féin is likely to benefit by any move to dissolve the 1937 territorial claim. Even among Northern nationalists who revile Sinn Féin, such a move is seen as fundamentally undermining their hope for Irish unity as the only guarantee against continued oppression within the Loyalist state. ●

tacks of the British establishment. We make them in the belief that the republican movement is squandering the spirit of resistance and have led the anti-unionist masses into a cul-de-sac.

It is impossible to predict whether the movement can possibly be persuaded into a ceasefire. It is difficult to imagine what the ruling classes can offer nationalists that would decisively break the core support among the most oppressed for the IRA. Equally, the IRA is unlikely to change its tactics now after rejecting for 20 years all the evidence of how counterproductive its armed campaign has been.

They simply do not share any notion of the self-organisation of the masses as the key to struggle against oppression. They blindly believe, what cannot be absolutely ruled out, that Britain may be forced to take a major initiative by an escalating campaign of bombing and disruption. It may be to bring down upon their own communities savage new

attacks by the state forces, such as mass internment of activists. They may believe that, as in 1971, the reaction to internment will be to draw new sections of sympathisers into active support, but that is far less likely to be the case today.

It is certain, however, that any political solution of the Irish question which Britain might be forced to initiate by a further escalation of the bombing campaign, and which might be agreed with Irish constitutional nationalists, will not be a progressive one in terms of wiping out the sectarian divisions and inequalities that confound working class politics in Northern Ireland and bedevil the struggle for socialism in the island as a whole.

Outside a perspective of social revolution in Ireland as a whole a thoroughgoing solution of the unfinished national struggle is impossible. For the moment, however, Irish republicanism stands as a major obstacle to the fight for such a programme. ●

NOTES

- 1 Comprises the open party Sinn Féin and the secret guerrilla elite, IRA, the Irish Republican Army.
- 2 The general collapse of the Stalinist regimes provoked no official statements by Sinn Féin, or even editorials in its press. The fundamental issues raised are relegated to the letter columns of the weekly *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. (AP/RN)
- 3 It could be argued, therefore, that the collapse of Stalinism has had an indirect effect on Sinn Féin in that this collapse has deeply effected nationalist-guerrillaist movements in Central America (e.g. FMLN and FSLN) and the ANC in South Africa.
- 4 The British Army, arriving at the end of 1969, cleared away the remaining nationalist barricades by July 1972. British Army murders of 14 Catholics on Bloody Sunday on a peaceful demonstration in January 1972 raised a storm which forced London to dissolve the Northern parliament and to rule directly from March of that year.
- 5 Sinn Féin formulated it in *Eire Nua* (New Ireland) during its most consciously 'right-wing' period after the 1970 split and has overturned no essential element of this programme at any time since its 'left turn'
- 6 AP/RN, 23 June 1979, cited in K Kelly, *The Longest War*, London, 1988, p303
- 7 *ibid* p304
- 8 Although this "stage-ist" conception of the relationship between the national and socialist struggle sounds as though it is taken from the arsenal of Stalinism, it in fact predates it. Sinn Féin take their socialist credentials from the ambiguous legacy of the indigenous Irish nationalist hero and revolutionary socialist James Connolly. Connolly's mistaken identification of national liberation with socialism was an exception which he believed to be specific to Irish conditions. It was never the kind of conscious class-collaboration advocated by Stalin to achieve a 'stage' of 'national freedom' which would postpone the fight for working class objectives to a later period. See "Connolly: A Marxist Analysis", A Johnston et al, Irish Workers Group, Dublin, 1990.
- 9 AP/RN 7 May 1992, p8.
- 10 AP/RN 22 April, 1992 p6. In the same light the IRA increasingly talks of the need for "disengagement" rather than British troops out.
- 11 Renamed for the second time. Previously the UDR, Ulster Defence Regiment.
- 12 "Towards A Lasting Peace", Sinn Féin, February 1992, p13.
- 13 Social Democratic and Labour Party, in fact a constitutional nationalist party with no base at all among Labour but which adopted this name to incorporate independent nationalist Labour figures in 1970.
- 14 In a twisted way it claimed to represent the tradition of William of Orange who liberated the North East from catholic King James in 1690.
- 15 How Britain spends its £3bn in the North. Mike Tomlinson (Queen's University of Belfast) in the *Irish Times*, 1 May 1993.
- 16 *ibid*.
- 17 It could be said that 1969 was the year when we witnessed the last anti-imperialist actions of the marginalised sectors of Fianna Fail *bourgeoisie*. But the few MPS responsible for overt help in providing funds for arms for the Catholics in the North were quickly purged. Anti-imperialist action has been the exclusive preserve of petit-bourgeois nationalists since and the working class.
- 18 George Quigley, chairman of Ulster Bank. Discussed in AP/RN 26/3/93.
- 19 Sinn Féin, instinctively fearful of European integration undermining its whole basis, opposes it with crass, utopian, nationalist arguments: "The impetus for the EC integration process is a hangover from the outdated politics of the Cold War. It is irrelevant and unsuited to the Europe of today. Is it not ironic that as centralised superstates are collapsing in eastern Europe through their own contradictions and bureaucracy, there is an unseemly rush to create just such a failed, multinational structure in western Europe?
The push for EC political and monetary union is not emanating from the people of Europe and it is not in their interests. It is seen rather to be in the interests of transnational capital for which the existence of sovereign independent states, especially small ones like Ireland, is a nuisance. Like Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the SDLP suffers from this inferiority complex and lack of faith in the Irish people's ability to manage their own affairs". AP/RN, 18 June, 1992
- 20 Attempts by some sections of the "left", based on conditions in the late 1970s, to characterise Ireland as a minor or 'sub-' imperialism have been exploded by the contradictions of the 1980s when a sharp rise in unemployment was accompanied by escalating emigration, profit repatriation and foreign debt (now about £15bn). Per capita national income has remained under 63% of the EC average over the 20 years of full membership (compared to the UK at about 100%). There is a persistent large net outflow of profits from the Irish economy, and a constant draining of both capital and surplus labour to US, Britain, Europe and other destinations. This is reflected in unemployment (at over 18%) growing throughout several years of improving trade surpluses and profits.

As British and Loyalists turn the screw... SWM and Militant join ICTU's 'peace' chorus

ISSUED BY THE
IRISH WORKERS GROUP
12 NOV '93

"Today must be the start, not the end, of a strike movement throughout the country against sectarianism and for peace"

Thus declared SWM in a leaflet to 10,000 Derry workers marching for a ceasefire by Provo and Loyalist guerrillas, on 3rd Nov. In public statements to the *Derry Journal* and on public platforms and in leaflets, SWM failed to *warn workers that their genuine thirst for peace* was being used to screw the lid back on the 25-year anti-unionist revolt. SWM made no attempt whatsoever to distinguish their position from that of the ICTU bureaucrats and their openly anti-Republican campaign.

Nowhere in their leaflet did they indicate—what individual members of SWM privately assure us—that SWM does *not* call for a ceasefire. Nowhere does the leaflet even mention the continued national oppression by the sectarian state, or even the existence of British imperialism, not to speak of reaffirming the call for British troops out...

Nowhere in the leaflet was there a mention of the sectarian state and its oppression of nationalists, let alone. Nor any criticism of Sinn Féin's sell-out of 25 years of anti-unionist revolt for nothing more than... a place for Sinn Féin at the negotiating table.

Is this a fundamental change of position by SWM? Or is it straightforward *deception* by an organisation which for 20 years has formally claimed to give unconditional support to the anti-unionist struggle, and defended the IRA *and the legitimacy of its struggle*? An organisation which correctly criticised previous peace movements—especially the Better Life Campaign of the ICTU—as playing into the hands of imperialism. An organisation which insisted that Protestant-Catholic workers' unity had always been, and would always be, fundamentally limited to episodes in the economic struggle *as long as the sectarian state was not smashed*.

Have all of these formally correct positions gone out of the window without the slightest public explanation in their press? Apparently not, if we are to accept the private assurances of SWM members.

Such deliberate public deception of masses of workers by SWM is entirely to be expected from an organisation whose most consistent quality over 20 years has been its talent for bending in the ideological wind of whatever milieu it operates in.

If recruiting in the North today means mimicking the positions of *Militant Labour*, then so be it, even though SWM has for 20 years openly attacked *Militant* for those same positions!

Members of SWM who want an honest accounting for their organisation's scandalous opportunism could do no better than begin by reading the IWG's account of 20 years of the Irish far left, focussed on the SWM, available for £1.50, *SWM—A Trotskyist Analysis*.

Workers Unity against Sectarianism? *Militant's* reactionary utopia

For all of its 20 years in Ireland, *Militant* has unashamedly applied the politics of its British mentors on Ireland—tailing the chauvinist labour bureaucracy of the imperialist power which props up the Six-County state.

Militant repudiated any understanding of the anti-Unionist revolt as an anti-imperialist national struggle. Year in and year out they equated as 'sectarians' the IRA and the Loyalist murder squads, refusing to defend Republican fighters.

Time and again the politics of *Militant* placed it objectively on the side of imperialist repression, and national oppression, by refusing any form of solidarity whatever with the actual struggles of the anti-Unionist nationalist movement.

While tens of thousands of *workers* as well as petit-bourgeois sections *struggled* openly in solidarity with the Hunger Strikers in 1980-81, *Militant* attacked the mobilisations as reactionary and sectarian and put forward *as an alternative* the call for resolutions in favour of the prisoners' demands in Northern Trades Councils and in the British Labour Party (*Militant 93, May '81*).

When 100,000 marched against Thatcher's murder of Bobby Sands, *Militant's* front page simply deplored the mobilisations for giving worldwide prominence to "sectarian organisations". "We make no apology", they wrote, "for highlighting some of those class aspects of the situation which the capitalist papers of the the world have failed to notice", and the article went on to instance protests against rent increases and civil servants' demands for a 10% wage increase!

Such bankrupt reformism in the face of living mass struggle around fundamental democratic rights, is inexcusable in any organisation which claims allegiance to Trotsky, Lenin or Marx.

It is deceitful for a 'Marxist' to claim that 'workers unity can stop the killing' when the same workers' unity, which every socialist craves, is fundamentally blocked precisely by the very sectarian class alliances which constitute the Northern Ireland State. Only a sect tailing the reformist bureaucracy of the Irish labour movement could lend 'Marxist' credentials to such fantasies. 'Workers unity against sectarianism' is exactly the same as calling on the masses to unite to fight against their own divisions! As if sectarianism had no objective foundations! *It begs all the questions* and abandons the oppressed and their fighters—however misguided—to brutal repression.

Unity of Protestant and Catholic worker is fundamental to winning socialism, but it will never be contrived by hiding the concrete need *here and now* to confront the *sectarian state* and the armed and sectarian forces powers which prop it up!

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The IWG co-produces the journal *Trotskyist International* as part of the LRCI.

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