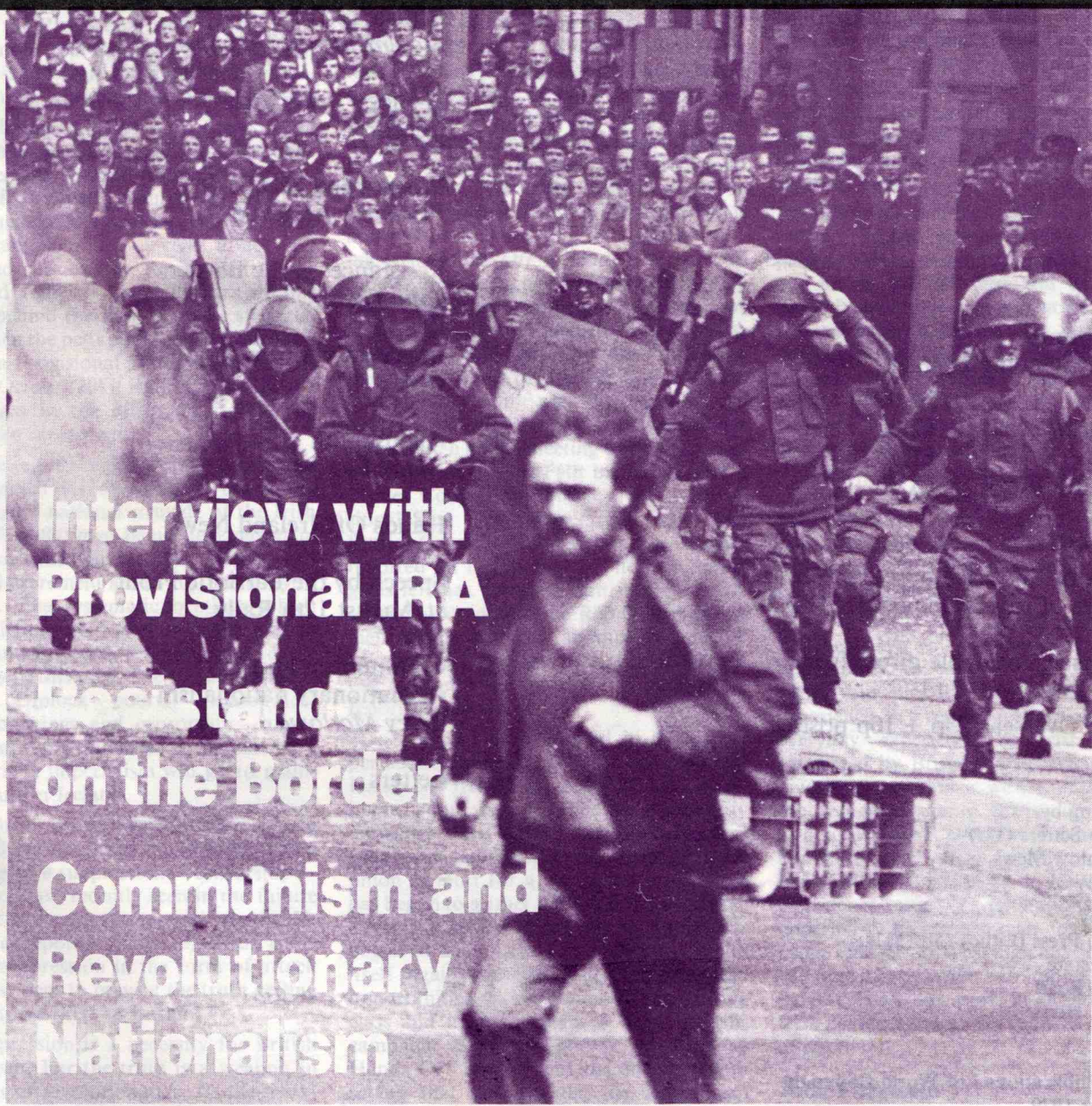


HANDS OFF IRELAND!

Revolutionary Communist Group

No.9

£1



**Interview with
Provisional IRA**

**Resistance
on the Border**

**Communism and
Revolutionary
Nationalism**


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Number Nine November 1979

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Editorial

British Imperialism and the Republican Movement

In *Hands Off Ireland!* No8 we pointed to the growing success of the Republican movement and the deepening crisis of British rule in Ireland (see 'The Irish War and British Strategy'). That issue had just gone on sale when we saw the most dramatic confirmation of the growing strength of the Irish people—the events of August 27 when Mountbatten and 18 soldiers were killed by the Provisional IRA. In this context it is more vital than ever for the British ruling class to isolate the Republican movement from the working class in this country.

This isolation takes many forms—the bourgeois propaganda against the Republican movement, the anti-Republican propaganda of the petit bourgeois left, the development of the pro-imperialist Young Liberal campaign and outright attacks on those who support the Republican movement and fight to unite workers in this country behind the Irish people's struggle. Thus, when the petit bourgeois left turns its back on a Provisional Sinn Fein march (as it did on October 20) it is directly aiding the ruling class in the effort to isolate the Republican movement.

In Ireland today the British state is using all the means at its disposal to crush the revolutionary national struggle of the Irish people. The 400 men being held naked in solitary confinement in cells awash with urine and excrement are living testimony to this fact. The systematic beatings which they, and their comrades in other jails in Ireland and England, are subjected to are testimony to this fact. The torture, assassinations, Diplock courts, house-raids, arrests, bannings and censorship—all of these things are evidence of the extent to which British imperialism will go to maintain its rule in Ireland.

The truth of British imperialism's role in Ireland is systematically suppressed. There is the *negative* suppression—censorship—such as we have recently seen in the failure to report the recent press visit to the H-Blocks (see report in this issue). There is the *positive* suppression in the form of attack and harassment to prevent the truth getting through to workers in Britain.

This suppression is a necessity for British imperialism. For the truth is a weapon in the hands of revolutionaries. As the working class in Britain—particularly the most

oppressed sections—increasingly suffers the ravages of the crisis, as the national liberation movements step up their struggles against imperialism, workers in this country will be ever more open to this truth. The British state and its allies must act *now* to head off the campaigns against British imperialism. We saw at Southall on 23 April the truth of this when the police rioted to drive Asian and black workers off the street. The ruling class is seeking to isolate the oppressed. It is in this context that the real meaning of the recent attacks on Hands Off Ireland must be seen.

The attack on Hands Off Ireland

Over the past six months Hands Off Ireland supporters have faced a series of attacks. So far this attack has resulted in three arrests under the Public Order Act and one for 'obstruction'. Two supporters of Hands Off Ireland face charges for 'distributing or displaying abusive or insulting' literature—the literature being *Hands Off Ireland!* no8 and a Provisional Sinn Fein leaflet about H-Block. Physical assaults on Hands Off Ireland meetings by right-wing organisations—such as the National Front and Loyalists—have been made or attempted in London, Bristol, Edinburgh and Manchester. The most serious being in Manchester when about 50 National Front and UDA members tried to storm a meeting (see *Hands Off Ireland!* no8 for full report). The press has added its weight by mounting scare campaigns against our work in Bristol and Runcorn. 'Storm erupts in city over IRA show' was the front-page banner headline of the *Bristol Journal*. 'Sinn Fein storm' was the echo in the *Widnes Weekly News*. These headlines referred to a public meeting to be addressed by Provisional Sinn Fein in Bristol and a Trades Council motion to invite a Provisional Sinn Fein speaker and show 'The Patriot Game' in Runcorn (both events are reported on in this issue). The petit bourgeois left has made its contribution by its continual attacks on the Republican movement and by the recent attempt by the RCT to sabotage a Provisional Sinn Fein/Hands Off Ireland street meeting in London (see report in this issue).

These attacks have erupted in the recent period because the two year campaign of Hands Off Ireland has begun to have a real impact. Our work in building a solidarity movement has begun to produce very successful meetings, it has created trade union support for a principled position, it has begun to attract Irish and British workers to the solidarity movement and it has begun to demonstrate its ability to defend itself against attack. This indicates the opportunities which lie ahead. The ruling class and its allies want to head off this campaign before it grows. As long as Hands Off Ireland was merely a bulletin *saying* that it supported the Republican struggle it was left alone. Now that we have

begun to organise an active movement on that basis we come under fire. Particularly terrifying to the ruling class is the fact that Hands Off Ireland insists on providing a platform to the Republican movement at every available opportunity.

The attacks so far are small beer compared to the onslaught directed against the Irish people. They are simply preliminary skirmishes which the ruling class hope will intimidate us. But with the help and active involvement of all our readers and supporters we will succeed in showing the ruling class that we are not frightened off so easily.

Our reply

Our reply to these attacks can be seen in the appearance in this issue of a full length interview with a spokesman of the military wing of the Republican movement—the Provisional IRA.

Our reply is to step up our campaign wherever we are attacked. That is why we returned to Cardiff where our comrades were arrested. We went not simply to protest against the arrests but, more importantly, to carry on, with Provisional Sinn Fein, the campaign which we had started the week before.

In the coming months we will be organising rallies, marches, pickets, trade union campaigns, street meetings, public meetings and so on. All of these will be directed towards the building of a principled solidarity movement in the working class. In our defence campaigns we have received great support from Provisional Sinn Fein comrades, Irish workers, Asian and black workers, comrades from other countries oppressed by imperialism, and from British workers. We know that this support will always be forthcoming for a revolutionary anti-imperialist movement because the oppressed and the exploited are ready, willing and able to take up the challenge of British imperialism.

We will turn every attack against our attackers. We will use every attack as an opportunity to increase our work and spread our support. We are beginning to experience, in a very minor way, what is the everyday experience of Irish workers oppressed by British imperialism. But we have made our choice: we are on the side of the oppressed against British imperialism. Just as we have every confidence in the ability of the Irish people to defeat imperialism in Ireland, so do we have every confidence that a revolutionary anti-imperialist movement can be built, is being built in the working class in Britain. We urge all our readers to join in this campaign and let our work in support of the Irish people stand as our reply to the recent attacks.

John Fitzgerald
21 October 1979

BRITISH TERROR

Reports from Belfast

July, 1979

Assaults on another nine prisoners in H-Block 4 on 3rd July brought the total number of beatings to 20 in less than a week. Yet again the wing shift which takes place once a week was used as an opportunity for attacks on defenceless prisoners. As the men made their way into the wing after crossing the administration area they were ordered to face the wall before being forcibly put through the degrading mirror search. This order is of course completely ignored as it is quite obviously nothing but blatant harassment. This then is the excuse for prison officers such as Hill and Nurse to physically display their hatred of 'Fenian scum'. PJ O'Kane, Andersonstown, was the victim of the worst assault as Prison Officer Nurse threw punch after punch into his back and ribs leaving him very badly bruised. K O'Hagen received the same brutality leaving him also badly bruised. C Crumley (Derry), J Conway (Derry), J Curran (Derry), P Cunningham (Short Strand), F McDonald (Andersonstown), J Turney (Ballymurphy) and J A McCooley were the other seven victims. John Anthony McCooley was unfortunate to have to undergo the same vicious and cowardly assault on two occasions, the second assault taking place as he made his way out for medical treatment. Officer Nurse was again the thug responsible. Nurse earlier last week viciously assaulted Seamus O'Connor under the same circumstances as he made his way out of the Block on a visit. S O'Connor was also left badly bruised and later had the injuries recorded on a medical sheet by the doctor.

Wing PRO, H-4

August, 1979

A chara

On Friday 17 August, when Gerard Burns, a Blanket man in H-5, was returning from his monthly visit he found that he was

once again to become the victim of the screws' victimisation policy. After undergoing a very rough search, during which he was kicked repeatedly by screws on the backs of the legs in an attempt to bend him over a mirror, Gerard was then sent to the Punishment Block on a charge of refusing to comply with the prison search procedure. Gerard spent 6 days in the P Block for this trumped up allegation, 6 days during which he was deprived of his bedding each day and kept in total isolation in the freezing P Block cell. While on the Boards, Gerard was also dragged by the hair from his cell to a 'court' presided over by a Prison Governor — a sham justification for their illegal treatment of this man.

In recent days in the H-Blocks it's been noticed that our food is once more being interfered with in a more serious fashion than simply stealing our food or leaving it unserved until it is cold. Of late the food is being drugged by penicillin or some penicillin compound as the Health Supervisors of the H-Blocks prescribe mass treatment regardless of men's particular allergies.

Eamon McConvey (22), a Blanket man from Downpatrick, recently developed an illness similar to an epidemic which swept the H-5 Block in April of this year. Diarrhoea and vomiting, the inability to keep any food in one's stomach, and a permanent weakness show the symptoms, and Eamon was immediately isolated in a cell in the wing. To further prevent this illness from spreading the medical staff began adding the penicillin to our food, though this action itself leaves a taste in the food, and results in those men who are allergic to this drug either risking breaking out in an irritating rash or leaving the food to one side and going hungry. This 'mass prescription' now being used once more in the H-Blocks should not be allowed to continue. Treatment of medical complaints is a personal matter, not something to which every man should be subjected without any consideration for men's particular allergies.

PRO H-Blocks, 3, 4 and 5

It's almost 3 full years now since the Blanket protest began, and by the time you read this the 3 years will be completed. 3 unbroken years of protest, of resistance, of refusal to compromise principle for privilege. On 14 September 1976 when Ciaran Nugent became the 1st Blanket man, he was not in actual fact doing anything new. Republican prisoners have consistently demanded the status of Prisoners of War in every campaign against the English so far. Stretching right back to the claim of Wolfe Tone to be treated as a POW in 1798, through to the Blanket men of 1979 we have a line of soldiers who continue to uphold their belief whether free or incarcerated. Sadly many men have died in prison striving to attain proper treatment. Who can forget the deaths in England (while on hunger strike) of Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg, men who tried to force the enemy to move them to Long Kesh POW camp from their English dungeon. In 1946, on May 11th, Sean MacEochaidh died in prison, while on hunger strike, though on this occasion the protest was directed against, not the foreign, but the domestic enemy — the 'Free Staters'. Sean was demanding the rights of a POW. At that stage many Republicans were imprisoned both North and South of the partition and also in England. A recent article in AP/RN dealing with the prison life of the late Joe Collins (RIP) told of how Irish POWs struggled, sometimes successfully, at other times paying the supreme price for the same ideals, POW status. Crumlin Rd. Gaol in 1943 witnessed both a Blanket protest and a hunger strike by Republicans for this status, as did the Curragh Camp. This campaign is no different. In 1972 a successful strike was held in Crumlin Rd. achieving status for the men in the gaols of the occupied North. It is that status, that hard won right, which is now being denied the H-Block men. When Merlyn Rees announced the ending of this status from March 1st 1976, no change had occurred in the war here, apart from a change in British lines of thought. But Irish thoughts do not change. We were POWs in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s, and just because of some reviewed British attitude this wasn't going to

change for us. If status had to be fought for and won before, then it would be fought for and won again. If, through our suffering, the world recognises us as POWs then suffer we will. No-one enjoys the horror of the H-Blocks, every man longs for the end of the pain here, and few would deny that 3 years is too long by far. But one thing remains certain. No amount of British torture will drive us from our course, and if it takes another 3 years the protest will go on. We owe that much at least to the brave men who died in the past for the same just aims for which we now protest in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh.

Is mise

PRO, H-Blocks 3, 4 and 5

September, 1979

At the moment there is an outbreak of sores and rashes in H-4. The disturbing thing about this outbreak is that it is in and around the anal passage. Most men also have severe diarrhoea. The reason for this latest outbreak of sores and rashes is simple. For the last 3 months the prison authorities have refused us, the Republican POWs in H-4, toilet paper so we have had to use dirty sponge to clean ourselves, with the result that we now find ourselves covered internally and externally in sores. Because in some cases the rashes and sores are internal there is a very grave danger that through time someone may become gravely ill and catch a disease which could be fatal. When we asked the screws for toilet paper they told us it is a privilege and as such we the blanket men are not entitled to any. When the doctor was asked about the toilet roll he said 'I will see'. But as yet we have received none. Another small point is that H-3 and H-5 do get toilet roll.

Since the windows were blocked some months back the amount of light and air getting into the cells in H-Block was greatly reduced. It was so bad that Frank Maguire MP said there was a danger of blanket men suffocating and so the boxes which cover the windows in the Blocks were opened a few inches to allow a circulation of air and light. Not so in H-4. The boxes still remain tightly shut so that there is little or no circulation of air and no light.

During the day the cells in H-4 are dark and gloomy and at night they are pitch black simply because the screws refuse to put the lights on. So for 24 hours in every day we the blanket men in H-4 are forced to live in darkness. When the prison authorities were asked why the lights were never turned on they said 'you have nothing to read so you don't need any light'.

If the situation keeps up I have no doubt

that the end result will be total blindness for some of the prisoners in H-4.

An Fear Bui,

Republican POW, H-4

Armagh

27th May, 1979

At present there are 40 women on protest for Political Status in 'B' Wing, Armagh Gaol. Most of the women have been on protest for 2½ years. Throughout all this time, it has been necessary to maintain a rigid discipline of ourselves as regards our physical and mental wellbeing. The reason for this is because of the conditions we have to endure and which are rapidly deteriorating especially since the Governor has now implemented a new 'get tough' policy, which in effect means more hostilities from the screws, is physical and verbal abuse of our visitors, rigorous body searches etc.

Firstly, we will outline the conditions which we are forced to endure. We are locked up 21 hrs per day with virtually nothing to occupy us as we are denied educational and handicraft work of any sort. We are sure you will no doubt appreciate the boredom and loneliness because of this continual lock-up. Indeed, one would be reminded of a zoo with the attendants (screws) continually checking up on their captives. We are only permitted one 30 minute visit per month with our families (6 hrs in the year is the total amount of time we have with our families). Communication with one's family is extremely important in circumstances such as these, but because of our protest these inhumane visiting restrictions are imposed on us. Letters, which are our basic form of communication, seldom reach us and if occasionally they do they are virtually unreadable due to the censor doing her 'job'. One can imagine the frustration and anguish such restrictions cause to families. As regards the food situation, we have to eat the prison food as we are denied food parcels. The prison food is totally inadequate. On quite a few occasions alien objects have been found in the food, eg wire wool in the chips, disinfectant on the potatoes. One would get the impression that there is a plot to poison us. The cook, who is in actual fact a screw, delights in tormenting us with petty regulation such as:-

1. He refused to send us up any tea
2. He has stipulated that 2 oz of cornflakes are all each girl requires
3. He refuses us enough bread and jam
4. He continually sends up leftovers for dinner, tea etc.

Because of the substandard food we receive

many girls are losing weight, which they can ill afford to lose.

Hygienic conditions are completely non-existent. As part of our protest we refuse to clean any part of the wing except for our cells. The result is that the bathrooms, toilets, kitchen, sinks, the whole wing in general is absolutely filthy. The smell is quite sickening. Flies and other insects continually buzz around the mass of dirt.

Many girls have caught infections which of course are treated with the usual ignorance by the prison doctor. The screws have this past few weeks brought 'workers' over from another wing to clean up here. The job of cleaning up is not even half-done, the main reason being that most of the workers are loyalists and during the time when they should be cleaning they are shouting abuse at us while we are locked up. Naturally, the screws stand by and watch. Quite often a very strong disinfectant (Jeyes fluid) is used. The smell of the disinfectant catches the chest and numerous girls have been sick because of it. This situation as regards hygiene is steadily worsening.

Jackboot tactics have quite frequently been used against us. On numerous occasions girls have received beatings at the hands of the screws, whose obvious delight in inflicting injuries can only be termed as sadistic.

This criminalisation policy by the British Government is doomed to failure. It has been a tactical manoeuvre in order to discredit the whole Provisional Movement, but this manoeuvre has backfired on the British because it has shown to the world the torture, murder, etc that Britain is inflicting on the Irish nation.

We, the women POWs in Armagh Gaol, ask you the people to support us. Condemn the inhuman treatment we are forced to endure. As we stated at the beginning conditions are rapidly deteriorating. So now at this crucial time we ask you for your support. Our fight is your fight.

**Protest POWs
'A' Company
B Wing - Armagh Gaol**

How do you describe a nightmare? For a visit to the H-Blocks is exactly that. It begins a week before your visit. The pass has arrived and once again the flutters inside begin. Your nerves go all on edge. You start wondering about how your husband will look. Sometimes he does look really bad and that's you wrecked right away. Perhaps he's been beaten since the last visit, you think he's maybe bruised, and all this builds up in your head until sometimes you feel you might crack up. The children suffer too. They can't sleep some nights. You

ask them why, knowing they are feeling the same as yourself. It's a big build-up before all the visits and all relations visiting the H-Blocks will tell you they feel the same.

The day has arrived. You're up early, get ready, try and look your best—just because he won't be looking his best doesn't mean he won't want to see you and the children looking well. The rush for the mini-bus. The sort of childish excitement amongst the wives and mothers, also the girl friends. The chatter all the way to the camp. The speculation that goes on, maybe next month political status will be here and we will have a weekly visit in better surroundings, bringing them a parcel and letter with us on our visit. All trying to keep each other's spirits up.

You arrive at the visiting reception, leave your pass and are checked out, and wait until you're searched. Then is the time when your nerves are so worked up you almost feel like being sick. Another wait until you are called for transport to the visiting area—No.345, then the surname of your husband, always a number in this awful place. You proceed down in the mini-bus, where you have another wait until you finally are brought in to one of the visiting boxes. Sometimes your husband is waiting for you and other times you can have as much as an hour's wait on him being brought in to you. This is when your mind goes blank. You have so much to remember to tell him and can't remember anything when you're on the visit. But then the whole visiting area is constructed to make you nervous, it's all so cold and impersonal. You're looking at your husband sometimes and wondering, is this really him, the man who when he went in was a healthy, happy-go-lucky person, now only a shadow of his former self—how he's aged, the strain of all his experiences shows on his face. Some men are so pale, others with maybe illness are flushed like a beetroot. By the time the visit is over you're completely drained. You're told the visit is over when the screw leaves the pass on the table and says 'time up'. You kiss goodbye, I can't bear to look at his face for fear I should break down and cry. I walk out and like a robot get on the mini-bus and outside before I realise, that's it, that's another monthly visit over. It carries on, on the way home down the M1 you realise that all the people are feeling as you do and not much is being said. The day passes. Then it's the next day I feel wrecked, shattered. I keep seeing his face, thinking what's happening to him at that moment. Did he get a beating on the way back from the visit? Did he sleep OK last night or was his cell hosed down? Must ask him on the next visit, if I remember.

H-BLOCK PRESS VISIT censored

In March the Northern Ireland Office staged its infamous rigged press visit to the H-Blocks in Long Kesh concentration camp. In that visit the press were not allowed to see or speak to any of the men on blanket protest. Following this rigged visit, the blanketmen issued an invitation to the press to visit again and speak to the prisoners. This invitation was issued on 26 July 1979. The H-Block Information Centre then arranged with the prisoners to give those journalists who responded to the invitation, monthly visit passes. The NIO then issued a statement claiming that the March visit had been genuine and that journalists had been given every facility to investigate the conditions. This hollow lie was exposed by Peter Martin, Northern Editor of the *Cork Examiner*, who had been on the March visit and stated that the press were not allowed to conduct a genuine open visit.

The H-Block Information Centre and the prisoners then set about organising the visits for any journalists prepared to go. Twelve journalists, representing Irish and British dailies, weekly papers, press agencies and radio, agreed to do the visits.

The NIO realised the danger of allowing a genuine visit to take place but could not openly prevent it as they had already claimed that they were prepared to allow the press access to the H-Blocks. In collusion with the prison authorities, the NIO contented itself with obstruction tactics. Wrong passes for visits were issued, wrong names went onto passes and some names were, mysteriously, omitted altogether. Passes normally arrive seven days in advance. This time they arrived three days in advance. All this was, according to the prison authorities, simply a 'clerical' error! Despite all this seven journalists went in to visit prisoners on 3 October 1979. These seven represented the *Irish News*, *Sunday*

News, *Daily Mail*, Independent Radio News (for the local London stations: Capital and LBC), Press Association and a free-lance reputed to be doing a report for *Tribune*.

Having failed to stop the visits the ruling class have fallen back on their old friend in need—censorship. This unprecedented press visit was barely mentioned in Britain. IRN carried reports on the evening of 3 October. The BBC did not mention it at all! No British national daily carried the story! What happened to the Press Association reporter's story? What happened to the *Daily Mail* reporter's story? Considering that the IRN reports included such things as the fact that some prisoners were so ill that they were vomiting worms, it can hardly be that the visit is not considered newsworthy!

The incident surrounding this visit, the censorship following it, only confirms that the ruling class is mortally afraid of the struggle in the H-Blocks. They do not dare to let British workers know about that struggle. They are afraid of the truth because the truth is on the side of the oppressed! The craven complicity of the ruling class press is also clear.

On the evening of 3 October a Belfast mother of two children was shot dead in her home by Loyalist assassins. She is the fifth victim of the assassination campaign in the last two months. This too is greeted with silence from the 'free' press! *Hands Off Ireland!* will continue to report the unreported, to speak the truth that British imperialism is so afraid of.

COMING EVENTS
PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN
BLOODY
SUNDAY
COMMEMORATION
MARCH
BIRMINGHAM
JANUARY 27 1980
PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN/
HANDS OFF IRELAND!
CONFERENCE ON
IRELAND
LONDON
CONWAY HALL, RED LION
SQUARE (nearest tube Holborn)
FEBRUARY 23 1980

WORMWOOD SCRUBS PRISONERS ATTACKED

On August 31 a vicious attack was carried out against prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs prison. That day was the third anniversary of the Hull prison riots and only a few days after the execution of Mountbatten and 18 British soldiers.

About 220 prisoners held a peaceful sit-in on the first floor of D Wing at 5.00 pm. They were protesting at the introduction of new regulations imposed by the Home Office. The regulations, cutting down 'privileges' and restricting the amount of personal money that prisoners are allowed, were announced in the jail circular 12/79. During the protest, which was peaceful throughout, 2 Assistant-Governors were involved in negotiation with the men. Prisoners from C Wing saw about 300 prison warders form up in the exercise yard. They were wearing helmets, padded jackets, gloves and carrying four foot long wooden staves and riotshields. According to a Home Office spokesman 110 of the 300 were 'specially trained' officers brought in from other prisons in the area.

At about 10.00 pm the cells on the landing were closed, locking out the peaceful protesters. Then, as one prisoner put it, 'the riot squad went mad'. The rioting warders burst into the wing and began assaulting everyone in sight. These assaults included one on a disabled prisoner who was beaten to the floor and then beaten while he was on the floor. If it had not been for the fact that some warders, not involved in the riot, opened some cells for refuge, injuries would have been even more serious and widespread. The rioting warders also entered the cells and smashed the prisoners' personal possessions. Before the prisoners were allowed back into the cells, they were forced to run the gauntlet of the riot-squad — staves, boots and fists were used.

So far 122 prisoners have been charged with disciplinary offences and 22 placed in

'segregation'. Four Irish POWs, held in D Wing, were moved out, after the riot. Many other prisoners were also moved. Gerry Young was transferred to Durham, Stephen Nordonne to Strangeways (Manchester), Roy Walsh to Wandsworth (London) and Phil Sheridan to Winchester. Roland Lynch who had bruises on the face and body also received stitches for a head wound. The head wound resulted in a great loss of blood which was witnessed by other prisoners. Roland Lynch was due for release but has now lost one month's remission and 'privileges'.

Alistair Logan, who is acting for some of the prisoners, reports that he was told that the medical orderly for D Wing had put stitches in the wounds of 69 men after the riot. One man had 22 stitches to the head, another had a broken collar-bone. These facts contrast sharply with the Home Office claim on 10 September that '5 prisoners had suffered minor injuries'. Following a call for a public inquiry by PROP (the prisoners' rights organisation) on 27 September, the Home Office revised the figure for those injured to 53. The prison authorities put a blanket ban on visits to all the prisoners concerned for two weeks after the warders' riot. Visits are still very restricted — many are closed visits. Very little information is coming out of the prison about the full extent of the attack.

Alastair Logan has issued a writ against the Home Office on behalf of one Irish POW, claiming damages for injuries received. He is seeking legal aid to do the same for five other prisoners. Alastair Logan has described the assault as 'a conspiracy to assault the prisoners' who were unarmed and put up no resistance. The rioting warders wore masks of scarves etc under their visors to escape identification. The two week ban on visits also allowed visible signs of injury to heal and clear.

The Wormwood Scrubs attack bears all the hallmarks of the attacks in Hull three years ago except that the screws have learnt to take extra precautions against identification and against information about the attack getting out. We know from the results of the Hull inquiry and the Hull trial that every effort will be made to prevent the truth getting out and to protect the hired thugs of the British prison system. The Hull prison officers who were, finally, found guilty of attacking defenceless prisoners were given suspended sentences of six and nine months. Irish POWs, of course, do not get the same treatment. They are hounded and harassed at every turn. Nor will there be any headlines in the ruling class press about the savagery of the screws.

Hands Off Ireland! supporters and Provisional Sinn Fein carried out a very successful picket of Wormwood Scrubs following the attack. There is no doubt that the savagery of the British prison system will be turned against not only Irish POWs

but any prisoner who dares to defend his or her rights.

POW status for all Irish political prisoners

End screw brutality!

*This report has been based very closely on a report in *POW* a bulletin on Irish POWs in England which is produced by Birmingham An Cumann Cabhrach and is available from Eddie Caughey, 2 Leabon Grove, Leahurst Crescent, Harborne, Birmingham B17 0LE. Comrades should send money to cover postage costs.

CARDIFF DEFENCE FUND

On November 13 the trial starts for the three comrades arrested in Cardiff on Saturday 15 September. By the time this issue appears the case will have started.

If the three are found guilty then there will be fines to pay. In any case there are likely to be costs to pay as well as the expenses involved in mounting the defence campaign. We need your financial commitment to ensure a successful campaign.

Please give generously and demonstrate that you will not allow the state to get away with its harassment of anti-imperialists.

Please send donations to:
49 Railton Road,
London SE24 0LN.

All money will go to the Defence Fund. Please make cheques payable to Sarah Martin—but we would prefer cash if possible.

STOP PRESS HUNGER STRIKE

On Thursday 8. November Brendan Gallagher, father of H-Block prisoner Willie Gallagher, announced that he had gone on hunger strike. The announcement was made at a House of Commons press conference organised by Ernie Roberts.

Brendan Gallagher stated that he was demanding a retrial for his son and a written guarantee that the British army will cease to harass his family.

Brendan Gallagher is, at the time of writing, on the 59th day of his strike and has affirmed his intention to continue until death if necessary. If Brendan Gallagher dies he will have been murdered by British imperialism.

RESISTANCE ON THE BORDER

The ambush at Warrenpoint in August which killed eighteen British soldiers was by far the most successful operation which the IRA has so far carried out during the present campaign against the British occupation forces in Ireland. It also drew attention once more in the most dramatic possible way to the fact that the war in Ireland is being fought as much in the rural areas of the North as it is in the urban ghettos of Belfast and Derry. Since 1972 well over 100 members of the British army and the RUC have been killed in the rural areas near the border. Because of the conditions obtaining in the border areas the IRA in these areas have often been able to launch attacks on British army and RUC patrols and installations on a scale rarely seen in urban areas, while there have also been numerous operations directed against economic and communications targets in these areas. The IRA is also able to exercise substantial territorial control in these areas: for example, it often operates extensive patrols and checkpoints on roads in border areas, while British troops rarely travel in such areas other than by helicopter. As a result, areas such as South Armagh, and the village of Crossmaglen in particular, have become synonymous with Irish resistance to British rule. What explains the intensity and determination of the resistance in these border areas?

The strength of the resistance in these areas essentially stems from the fact of the border itself and what it represents. When the border was imposed on the Irish people through partition in 1921 it was based on the simple criterion of the largest possible area which the loyalists could hold. If the new state of 'Northern Ireland' had included only those areas where loyalists had a majority this state would be less than half its present size. Hence the new state included large rural areas—notably in Co. Tyrone and the border areas of Cos. Armagh, Down and Fermanagh—where there were large nationalist majorities, while three counties of Ulster (Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan) were excluded: if the latter had been included the loyalist majority in 'Northern Ireland' would have

been in danger, while their exclusion ensured an overall loyalist majority in the new state. The price of this cynical British 'solution' was (and is) the presence in the new state of large rural areas—as well as the nationalist communities in Belfast and Derry—which were (and are) opposed to the very existence of the state itself. As Sean MacStiofain has said, the border 'was designed to gerrymander electoral districts on a deliberate sectarian basis, not for military defence' (*Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p213)—a fact which the British army has discovered to its cost over the last ten years as it has vainly attempted to crush the resistance of the people in the border areas.

The imposition of the border in 1921 was naturally particularly resented in the border areas, where entire nationalist communities found themselves forcibly incorporated in the new loyalist state and separated from neighbouring communities—with which they were (and are) closely linked by family, social and economic ties—which were included in the southern state. It is therefore not surprising that such nationalist communities located near the border have since 1921 been amongst the strongest centres of resistance to the 'Northern Ireland' state. In this connection it is interesting to note that the areas which in 1921 became border areas did not figure particularly prominently in the war of independence of 1919-1921 against the British which ended in the partition of Ireland. While this was indeed pre-eminently a rural guerilla war the fiercest fighting took place in the south and west of Ireland. Although a certain level of military activity was maintained by the IRA in South Armagh and neighbouring areas during the war of independence, it was only after partition that these areas, which now became border areas, really came to the fore as areas of strong republican resistance.

This resistance has manifested itself in the border areas in each of the decades since partition. The strongest expression of this tradition of resistance prior to the present

campaign came at the time of the IRA border campaign in the 1950s. Even before this campaign began the people in the border areas expressed their strong support for the IRA at the Westminster election of 1955. At this election over 150,000 people voted for two Sinn Fein candidates (both of whom were in prison at the time for IRA activity) who stood on a purely abstentionist platform for the seats of Mid-Ulster and Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Both candidates won, but as 'convicted felons' were ineligible to hold their seats. It is also significant that when the IRA campaign itself was launched at the end of 1956 it was largely concentrated in and drew its strongest support from the border areas: the campaign failed mainly because of the lack of strong support for the campaign elsewhere in the North, particularly in the urban areas.

The strong republican tradition in the border areas, however, is not due simply to the imposition of the border. The border which established the state of 'Northern Ireland' in fact symbolises not only the political oppression of the Irish people but also their economic oppression. In the rural areas the most fundamental form of economic oppression is the inequitable distribution of the land. Any visitor to South Armagh in particular will be struck by the contrast between the poor land in this area—rocky, mountainous and barren—and the rich, fertile land owned by loyalist farmers further to the north. This disparity is directly rooted in the history of the British oppression of Ireland. In the seventeenth century settlers from Britain were 'planted' by the British government in Ireland (particularly in the north-east of the country) in order to pacify and control the country on behalf of Britain. These settlers were accordingly given the best land, while the dispossessed native Catholics were forced to try to scratch a living on the worst land—usually as tenant farmers rather than owners—or to become landless labourers or to emigrate. At the same time a tradition of agrarian resistance emerged which continually challenged the British and loyalist occupation of the land, notably in the

rebellion of 1798 which was brutally crushed by the British. The limited land reform which was eventually introduced in response to rural agitation — and in particular the activities of the Land League — at the end of the nineteenth century, which allowed tenant farmers to become owners of their lands, did nothing for those without any land or for those with too little or poor land. It also, of course, did nothing in relation to the distribution of land between the loyalists and the dispossessed nationalists.

Agrarian resistance has therefore always been entwined with the national question in Ireland. Hence it is not surprising that the tradition of agrarian resistance played a large part in the war of independence of 1919-1921: not only did most of the fighting take place in the rural areas but most of the recruits to the IRA were the sons of small farmers and landless labourers in these areas. It is also significant that those areas of Ireland where opposition to the treaty imposing partition was strongest were also those areas characterised by strong agrarian revolutionary aspirations — a determination among the small farmers and landless labourers to bring about a fundamental redistribution of the land. Nevertheless at this time, as with the nationalist tradition, the tradition of agrarian revolt was most strongly concentrated in the south and west of Ireland rather than in the north. While there had been a fierce land war in the South Armagh area in the early nineteenth century, when the Catholic small farmers had successfully resisted attempts by their British and loyalist landlords to drive them from the land altogether, the area had again become peaceful by the late nineteenth century.

Indeed there was such a relatively low level of agrarian agitation in South Armagh in the late nineteenth century that the British government was forced to invent a state of lawlessness in this area in order to justify the extension to it of the repressive measures embodied in the Coercion Act (the forerunner of the modern Emergency Provisions Act) which were being applied elsewhere in the country. To this end government agents committed a number of 'outrages' — mainly involving the destruction of property — in the Crossmaglen area. The British government and the press, in language very similar to that used by them today in relation to the same area, then began to describe Crossmaglen in particular as a notorious centre of bloodshed and murder, where stern measures were required to restore order. Nevertheless the very fact that the relatively limited activities of the Land League in South Armagh attracted such an hysterical reaction from the British government and the press is itself significant. The North of Ireland was seen then, as today, as the bastion of British rule in Ireland: hence any threat to that bastion — such as even a low level of



agrarian agitation — had to be immediately and severely repressed. What transformed South Armagh from being a relatively peaceful area into a stronghold of republican resistance was partition — the forcing into the immediate consciousness of the local people of their political and economic oppression by a sectarian state.

Economic oppression in the rural areas, however, is not limited to the question of land. The 'Northern Ireland' state has also reinforced discrimination against the nationalist people in relation to employment and housing. Such discrimination is particularly entrenched in the rural areas near the border precisely because of the nationalist majorities in such areas, and it is significant that the civil rights movement in the North of Ireland first emerged in 1968 in these areas. The nationalist majorities in these areas, as already explained, meant that there had to be systematic gerrymandering — even in relation to the boundaries of the state itself — in order to guarantee loyalist control of the local authorities of such areas. This ensured loyalist control of local authority housing and of the employment which depends on the local authorities: the latter is particularly important in the rural areas near the border, where there are very high levels of unemployment. Even the impact of the post-war boom in the 1960s was channelled through the sectarian structures of the state: new industries, funded by the British government, were located overwhelmingly in the loyalist areas of the north-east, while the nationalist areas near the border remained poor areas of high unemployment. Hence the forcible establishment of the 'Northern Ireland' state in 1921 not only led to the tradition of agrarian resistance in relation to the land question being increasingly concentrated in

the new border areas, but also further reinforced that tradition by institutionalising discrimination against the nationalist people in the new state and thereby ensuring the continued impoverishment of the nationalist rural areas.

The strong, uncompromising tradition of rural resistance to political and economic oppression in Ireland is therefore now focused on the border areas of the Northern state. The protagonists in this struggle — the IRA supported by the local people on the one hand and the British army and the loyalist forces of the RUC and the UDR on the other — are, in their modern forms, the same as they have been for over 300 years. The crucial factor in this struggle, and the key to the IRA's success, is the constant support given by the local people to the IRA. It has been said in relation to the war of independence that what confronted the British forces in the rural areas was 'not merely a poorly-armed guerilla force, but a guerilla force sustained by the disciplined courage and almost incalculable united strength of an awakened people' (Florence O'Donoghue, *No Other Law*, p177): exactly the same applies today, except, of course, that the guerilla force — the IRA — is not so poorly armed.

The support which the local people give to the IRA is not simply passive, but is positive and active in many ways, ranging from the obstruction of British army activity (such as filling in craters blown in unapproved border roads by the British army) to the passing on of intelligence information, the provision of safe houses, and the storing and moving of arms and explosives. The most important kind of support is probably the constant provision of intelligence information in relation to

the movements of British forces. The crucial importance of this kind of help has again been emphasised in relation to the war of independence. Tom Barry, for example, who commanded the West Cork Brigade of the IRA during the war, has said that 'unasked and unorganised, nine out of every ten of the adult civilian population were watching and reporting to us on the movements of the British troops or on the activities of any suspected British agent'. (*Guerilla Days in Ireland*, p.192). The provision of such intelligence information is equally important today. By contrast, the British army is severely hindered by its lack of local intelligence information in relation to the IRA.

The strong popular resistance upon which the IRA is based also pervades the cultural and social life of the border areas since Republicanism has always been a dominant force in the cultural traditions of these areas. Popular support for the IRA is also expressed in the impressive monuments to IRA volunteers who have been killed in action in these areas. A new monument has in fact just been erected in the village square at Crossmaglen. The monument consists of the bronze figure of an anguished man symbolically astride a phoenix, with an inscription on a marble plinth which reads: 'Glory to all praised and humble heroes who have willingly suffered for your unselfish and passionate love of Irish freedom'. The tricolour flags which are defiantly flown throughout the border areas are a further constant reminder of the Republican aspirations of the local people of these areas.

The close relationship between the IRA and the local people is naturally reflected in the IRA itself, since the IRA in these areas draws its recruits entirely from the local small farming and village communities. While the IRA is firmly based in the local communities, however, the volunteers in the border areas are fully aware of the way that their struggle in these areas forms part of the overall struggle against British imperialism in Ireland. The war which they are waging in the border areas is seen by them as being of crucial importance in sapping the morale of the British forces through inflicting a high casualty rate, in tying down large numbers of British troops and in preventing the isolation and containment of the struggle in the urban areas of Belfast and Derry. In terms of their political orientation, the volunteers in these areas have studied the writings of men such as Tone, Lalor, Mitchel and Connolly, and they strongly adhere to the view that the war in which they are engaged is being fought for social revolution in Ireland and not just for national unity and independence. The orientation of the IRA in these areas was perhaps best exemplified by Michael McVerry, who commanded the 1st Battalion of the South Armagh Brigade of the IRA until he was killed in an attack on

Keady RUC barracks in 1973. IRA volunteers in South Armagh today remember that McVerry always emphasised that the war was being fought to free the poor and oppressed people of Ireland. In stressing the link between the national and the social questions he not only expressed his fundamental agreement with James Connolly but was himself often likened to Connolly by local people. The attitude to the struggle expressed by Michael McVerry is still very much the attitude which guides the IRA in the border areas today.

Because of the massive popular resistance in the border areas the British state can only attempt to retain some semblance of control over these areas at the expense of permanent military occupation. Even this pretence of control rarely extends beyond the heavily fortified barracks in the villages. The British army in effect treats the border areas as if they were areas in a foreign country under military occupation (which, of course, is exactly how the local people also view them). The villages in these areas are therefore dominated by military camps — besieged outposts in a hostile country. In Crossmaglen, for example, the village square is lined on one side by a massive army barracks, with an elaborate spy-post overlooking the square itself, while armoured cars constantly cover the approaches to the village against the ever-present danger of a surprise attack by the IRA. At the nearby village of Forkhill the British army has gone even further and has built massive concrete emplacements into the mountain overlooking the village for the purpose of constantly observing the entire village and monitoring the movements of its inhabitants. Such villages are also periodically subjected to mass raids by the British army, when the villages are sealed off and in effect placed under martial law, while British troops conduct search and arrest operations, interrogating and photographing the inhabitants for the British army's intelligence files.

Given the obvious failure of such measures to crush the resistance of the people in the border areas it is not surprising that — as elsewhere in the North of Ireland — loyalist killer gangs should have taken it upon themselves to try to terrorise the people into giving up their support for the liberation struggle. This has taken the form of random assassinations of Catholics in the predominantly loyalist areas to the north of the border areas, particularly North Armagh. In the latter area alone over forty Catholics were killed by loyalist gangs between 1972 and 1976, and many more have been killed in neighbouring areas in Co. Tyrone and Co. Down. The purpose of these killings was clearly to pressurise the IRA and the people in the nationalist areas near the border into giving up their struggle against British rule. Similar killings have in fact always occurred whenever the nationalist people have seriously chal-

lenged British rule, and have only been halted by retaliatory action. Hence when the loyalist killings — unhampered by the state forces and indeed at times carried out by these forces, particularly the UDR — reached a crescendo in 1975 the nationalist people once again took the only effective course of action which was open to them and hit back at the loyalist population. This retaliatory action culminated in the killing of ten Protestants at Whitecross in South Armagh in January 1976. The result on the one hand was cries of outrage from British and loyalist politicians (in contrast to the complacency and virtual silence which had greeted the earlier loyalist killings), the stigmatising of South Armagh as 'border country', and the sending in of the SAS to the border areas; on the other hand loyalist killings in North Armagh and neighbouring areas stopped abruptly. It is clear therefore that the only sectarian element in the conflict is that which, deriving from the basic nature of the 'Northern Ireland' state itself, was introduced by loyalist killer gangs with their slaughter of Catholics: until 1975 not a single Protestant civilian had been killed in the border areas and nationalist retaliation against the loyalist population ceased as soon as the loyalist killings stopped. While the nationalist people were eventually forced to take action to defend their communities against loyalist killers, their basic struggle as always is against British rule, off which Loyalism feeds and has fed for centuries.

The war being fought by the IRA and the local people against the British army in the countryside and villages of the border areas is therefore the continuation of a tradition of resistance and of a struggle which has lasted for hundreds of years. There is no doubt at all that this resistance will continue until Britain finally releases its grip on Ireland, and the people in the border areas — so cruelly betrayed by the 'settlement' in 1921 — can at last live in peace and play their part in the creation of a truly independent Irish socialist republic.

John Clare

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Editorial note: This interview was given to *Hands Off Ireland!* in September by a spokesman for the Irish Republican Army authorised to speak on behalf of the Army Council.

Hands Off Ireland! How would you assess the significance and the political effect of the execution of Lord Mountbatten and the ambush at Warrenpoint?

IRA: The main effect of the operations was to draw attention to the situation in the occupied North. It had an effect both in Britain and in the twenty-six counties. It undermined all that had been said about normalisation. Normalisation in fact had already been undermined but these two operations put a full stop to it. The CPI criticised the Mountbatten operation as being elitist and said that the effect of the operations would be to put back democracy and to produce more repression. But the British could not be more repressive. They already have the Diplock courts, the Emergency Provisions Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act; and although capital punishment was not reintroduced they already have capital punishment in effect with British soldiers shooting people down in the streets. But, despite the venom of the British press, the British government is still sticking to its normalisation policy. When Atkins made his speech in Newry last week saying that the measures which were already available to the government were sufficiently 'draconian' he was in effect saying that the British government would resist the pressures for the re-introduction of internment. The loyalists have shown that they disagree with the government sticking to the normalisation policy, so there have been a number of stunts such as the Thatcher visit to try to placate them. The fact that the

British government is going to strengthen the RUC with another 1000 men rather than bring in more troops supports the view that it will stick to its normalisation policy, although the possibility of the re-introduction of internment obviously can't be ruled out. The RUC still wants to be in control of security and interrogation but it doesn't want to be in the front line. So the strategy is still to use the British army to try to wear down the IRA and the republican population — accepting casualties among British soldiers — and then the RUC will come in for the kill.

The British government and Jack Lynch basically agree. The British government says that there can be no political initiative until the IRA is defeated, while Lynch says that there must be a political initiative in order to defeat the IRA: both agree that the IRA must be defeated if there is to be any progress, whereas we say that there can be no progress until British imperialism in Ireland is defeated. The British media blamed the twenty-six counties for the Mountbatten and Warrenpoint operations: it was a racist attack on the twenty-six counties for all that's wrong with the six counties, diverting blame away from the British presence as the real cause of the problem. The media in the twenty-six counties as usual also condemned the IRA: the Republican Movement is denied access to the media, so we cannot get our point of view across to the people. But the summoning of Lynch to London and the talk of Lynch being 'carpeted' had the opposite effect to that intended in the twenty-six counties. The media in the twenty-six counties began to take a more considered attitude to the operations, putting them in a broader context, and Lynch began saying that the British government must take a political initiative — although, of course, he caved in when he got to London. Also just yesterday

Sile De Valera made a very 'republican' speech, calling for the resolution of the national question, which was a direct attack on Lynch.

HOI: So would you say that the operations have had a more significant political effect in the twenty-six counties than in relation to the British government's strategy, which as you say still seems to be to stick to the policy of normalisation?

IRA: To some extent, yes. But militarily the operations have had a tremendous impact on the British army. The British soldiers were completely demoralised by the Warrenpoint ambush. It was our biggest operation since 1921. It was the Parachute Regiment's biggest loss since Arnhem, and the British army's biggest loss since the Korean war. The British soldiers had been repeatedly promised that the war was nearly over. The war has now gone on for ten years, and then there is this massive blow and there is still no sign of victory. We have also shown that we can extend the war by striking at targets in Britain and Germany. So even Atkins is now talking about a long-term war.

HOI: The IRA has said that it is now geared towards fighting a long war of attrition. Did this involve a difficult re-adjustment from the time when perhaps you thought you were on the point of victory?

IRA: It involved a big psychological re-adjustment. We thought at one stage that the British were going to pull out, but it became clear that what looked like signs of a British withdrawal were simply the effects of the world-wide recession. Now recruits to the IRA know that, if they're captured, they won't just be in jail for a few months and

then released in an amnesty. So this re-adjustment did affect morale to some extent in 1977, but now of course morale is very high. While the IRA was reorganising itself in 1977 there was a lot of pressure on us to step up operations, but we always held back until we had completed our reorganisation and were ready, and we are now seeing the results.

HOI: Apart from purely military training, how high a priority does the IRA put on political education among the volunteers?

IRA: When volunteers are trained in the techniques of armed struggle they are also taught the politics of armed struggle: in other words, they are taught not merely how to use guns but why they are using guns — why armed struggle is necessary. They are given lectures in which they are taught the kind of Ireland that we need and that we are struggling for.

HOI: It's often been said that the IRA has been moving to the left in recent years. How far do you think this is true?

IRA: The IRA views itself as a radical organisation. It is committed to a democratic socialist republic as proclaimed in 1916. I think the best way to answer this question is to point out that the bulk of the membership of the IRA is drawn from the working class and small farmers, and as Brigadier Glover said in his report (the secret British intelligence document which was captured by the IRA) if middle class people do join the IRA they have to sacrifice their life-style. The Brits know that all the talk about 'godfathers' is lies. They know what our houses are like, they know that the volunteers don't have much money and they know that the volunteers are not gaining anything in a material way from the situation.

HOI: How far does the IRA see its own struggle as part of a wider struggle against imperialism, for example in relation to the struggle in southern Africa?

IRA: The Republican Movement orientates itself very much towards the Third World, and we are in complete solidarity with national liberation movements overseas. Sinn Fein, of course, has many contacts with other liberation movements, and Ruairi O'Bradaigh (President of Sinn Fein), for example, sent a message of congratulations from Sinn Fein to the Sandinistas after their victory in Nicaragua.

HOI: What is your attitude towards the INLA?

IRA: What brought the INLA into the headlines, of course, was the killing of Airey Neave, which was a good operation. The INLA has a similar outlook to us, but they've reached it through a haphazard

path, because they emerged as the result of a split from the Sticks (Republican Clubs).

HOI: So they've reached the same position as you but in a round-about way?

IRA: Yes, but militarily they are limited because of their small numbers.

HOI: Do you foresee the IRA and the INLA working together in the future?

IRA: No, I don't think that will happen, mainly because of the previous history of the INLA. There is no need for the IRA to merge with the INLA since we have the capacity — especially if we win the political war properly — to win the war against British imperialism in the North. We don't see ourselves as being in competition with the INLA — we are only in competition with the Brits — but there is no doubt that we command most support among the nationalist people.

HOI: In an interview which was published in Magill earlier this year the INLA said that although they admired the Provisionals militarily they were critical of you politically. How would you respond to that?

IRA: I would really blush for them making that kind of criticism, when you consider the strength and the size of our movement and all its political contacts, and compare it with the INLA.

HOI: I think the INLA meant that they think the Provisionals are too vague on the question of socialism.

IRA: If you're a small group like the INLA you can afford to be doctrinaire, but we can't afford to lose our mass support. There are people involved in the armed struggle who vote for the SDLP, and there are people in the twenty-six counties who help us but at the same time vote for Fianna Fail. We are trying to bring people along with us, because you cannot create a new society without mass support providing the muscle to do it. We have made it clear that our struggle is orientated towards liberating the poor and oppressed and that we are in solidarity with other liberation struggles abroad.

HOI: How do you see the relationship between your own struggle and the struggle of the British working class?

IRA: They are obviously linked: as Marx and Lenin said, a nation which enslaves another can never itself be free. The struggle of the working class in Britain would be greatly advanced by the victory of the IRA in the North of Ireland. It would be a great psychological blow for the British ruling class. It would also be a great blow for the British army. The situation in Britain is in some ways very similar to the situation in the

North of Ireland. Urban areas and housing, for example, are very similar: in Britain certain areas are identified on the basis of race, while in the North of Ireland areas are identified on the basis of religion. The British army, of course, has learned a lot from the war in Ireland in terms of training for counter-insurgency operations in Britain. We would have a lot to offer in helping to combat that when the need arises in Britain.

HOI: What is your view of the British left in relation to the question of building a solidarity movement in Britain?

IRA: We would be very critical of the British left. On the question of building a solidarity movement, we believe that there are two main factors which will lead to the defeat of British imperialism in Ireland — the resistance of the nationalist people and public opinion in Britain turning against the war.

HOI: The question is whether the left in Britain should try to build a solidarity movement simply on the basis of war-weariness among the British people and dilute their demands to correspond to this — as much of the British left does — or whether they should try to build a principled anti-imperialist movement in the British working class. We take the second view, partly because such a movement would help to stop the British government from imposing a neo-colonial 'solution' — such as an 'independent' Northern Ireland or some kind of confederation between the six and twenty-six counties — when it finally withdraws the troops. What would be your view on this question?

IRA: Our view is that we welcome any kind of pressure on the British government, from wherever it comes. We certainly do see the need for a principled anti-imperialist movement in the British working class, for the reason which you've mentioned, but when you consider the attitudes of the British working class and how it was possible for a Tory government to be elected it is very difficult to see how a strong anti-imperialist movement in complete solidarity with us can be built in the British working class at the moment.

HOI: How far do you see a possible attempt by the British government to impose a neo-colonial 'solution' of some kind as a real danger? Do you think that the IRA would be able to defeat such a move?

IRA: It is a danger, but I don't think they will be able to outflank us in that way. We see the armed struggle linking up with agitation on economic issues in the twenty-six counties: this would prevent us from being outflanked by a neo-colonial 'solution'. Sile De Valera in her speech yesterday was objectively coming towards a Provo position,

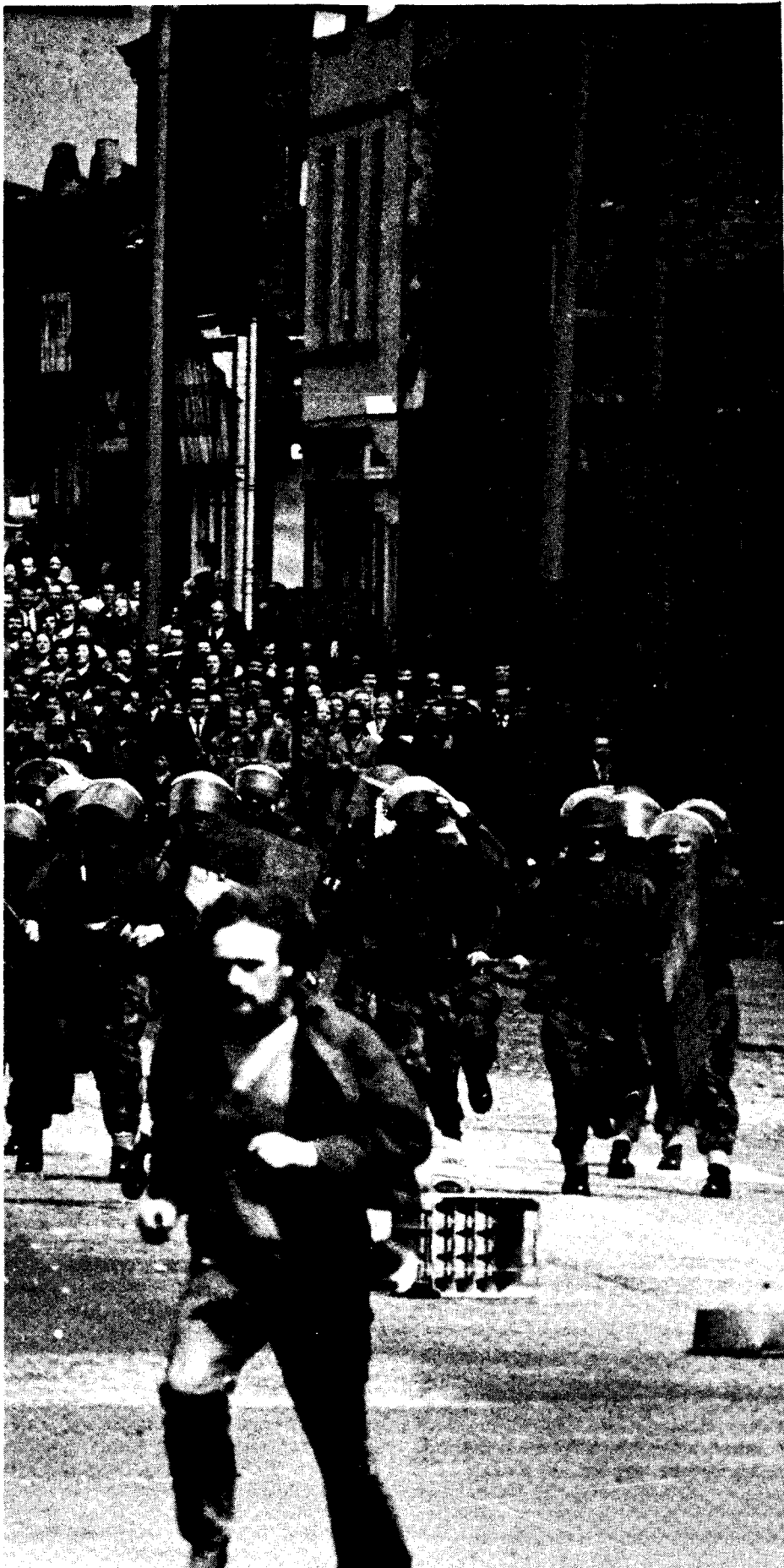
although she would reject the use of violence. People like her will try to draw support away from us and behind a neo-colonial 'solution': they will pretend to be republicans, whereas it's us who have been fighting and dying for decades in defence of the Republic. If we can build a mass movement in the twenty-six counties we will be able to head off this kind of development, just as an anti-imperialist movement in the British working class would also help to prevent it.

HOI: The IRA is often criticised by left-wing groups both in Ireland and in Britain on the grounds that what they call its 'elitism' and 'militarism' prevents the development of a mass movement against British imperialism in Ireland. For example, the Mountbatten operation was criticised by the CPI, as you mentioned earlier, and by the SWP in Britain on the grounds that killing prominent people is an elitist form of activity which hinders the building of a mass movement. How would you reply to this sort of criticism?

IRA: Well, to criticise the killing of prominent people would seem to be a recipe for killing working class people!

HOI: What about the general argument, though, which groups like PD in the North and similar groups in Britain are always putting forward—that is, counterposing the armed struggle of the IRA, which they describe as elitist, to the building of a mass movement?

IRA: The point is that the IRA grew out of a mass struggle. The armed struggle of the IRA is challenging British imperialism in Ireland for the first time for many years: no-one else is seriously challenging the British. PD's position in essence is the same as the Sticks'—hoping to bring nationalists and loyalists together and democratise the North. In the end the choice is either to lie down and be a slave or to stand up and become a person. When Trotsky criticised 'individual terrorism' the sort of activity which he was attacking was elitist—actions by individuals which were unrelated to any wider struggle or mass support. The situation here is totally different. As far as these left groups are concerned if activity takes place nearby it is elitist, but if it takes place far away it is all right. 'Terrorism', of course, is the capitalist term for armed struggle, and it sometimes seems that these groups are influenced by the same sort of ideas. What separates the IRA and other liberation movements from 'individual terrorists' is that the IRA is continually drawing in new recruits from the young people of the community, and it is therefore continually being regenerated.



AUGUST 12

WHAT IT MEANS

August 12th 1979 saw a curious phenomenon — a jubilant celebration in Belfast and a miserable wake in London — both commemorating the same event: the entry of British troops into the nationalist ghettos of the North of Ireland in August 1969. Both were marking 10 years of war between British imperialism and the Irish people. Yet the political significance of these two marches could not have been more different.

In Belfast the Provisional Republican Movement led 15,000 workers in defiant celebration of the advances made in their war for self-determination. As *An Phoblacht/Republican News* put it:

'The march this Sunday in Belfast is an act of resistance. It is a march in support of our armed comrades, it is a salute to our prisoners everywhere, an especial salute to the courageous and heroic blanket men.'

'Brits must go!' (*An Phoblacht/Republican News* No28 p1)

By contrast, the British petit bourgeois socialists moped along behind the Young Liberals, beating their breasts as they bemoaned the tragedy of continuing violence in Ireland. The East Midland Young Liberal Federation (EMYLF), for instance, could declare:

'its support for the long term ideal of a united Ireland. However, EMYLF rejects and condemns outright the use of violence as a means of achieving this end.' (*Nottingham News*, 7 September 1979)

In fact, far from congratulating the Republican Movement for their continuing resistance in the face of perhaps the world's most ruthless war machine, the British petit bourgeois left treated Provisional Sinn Fein like a poor relative reluctantly invited to a funeral.

How can this be? How can the same anniversary reveal such different reactions among those with apparently the same aim: getting Britain out of Ireland? The answer is quite simple. The key is the growing success of the Republican struggle. The defeat of British strategy in Ireland is a victory for the Irish working class, but terrifies the British petit bourgeoisie.

Every strategy that British imperialism has attempted in the last 10 years to hold down

working class rebellion in Ireland has failed. It failed to buy off the nationalist working class with paper reforms and worthless promises to end discrimination. It failed to con them with bogus 'power-sharing'. It failed to isolate the Provisional Republican Movement by internment and naked terrorisation of the nationalist population. And now it has failed in its latest attempt: 'Ulsterisation' and 'criminalisation'. The military successes of the IRA have made it impossible to 'Ulsterise' the North of Ireland by replacing British troops with RUC and UDR thugs. The magnificent courage of the H-Blocks protest for Prisoner of War status has completely smashed the British attempt to 'criminalise' the Republican prisoners.

British strategy is in smithereens. And the ruling class knows only too well the reason: the complete unity of the Provisional Republican movement and the nationalist working class. Every strategy has only revealed the Republicans as the sole true defenders of Irish workers.

The Belfast march on August 12th was the ultimate proof of this unity. The march was planned and carried out explicitly as a display of support for the armed struggle. In defiance of British 'legality', a uniformed IRA colour party led the demonstration, followed by a banner declaring 'Victory to the IRA!'. Armed Volunteers mingled with local people in the Falls Road. At the rally, members of the IRA and Cumann na mBan displayed their weapons, while one of their number read out a statement. All of this was received with ecstatic enthusiasm by the solidly working-class crowds that flooded out of their homes in West Belfast.

Who can now deny the popularity of the Provisional Republican Movement in the nationalist working class? Who were the 15,000 marchers, and the thousands more who lined the route, if the Republican Movement has no support? If the crowds were only showing their humanitarian concern for the prisoners, why did they burst spontaneously into applause as the IRA passed by? How could thousands of workers be intimidated into rapturous applause and cries of 'I..I..IRA!' when a single armed volunteer appeared by the platform? All the myths perpetrated by the British ruling class and their agents were finally shattered on August 12th.

The truth for once reached the headlines of

the most reactionary papers in Britain. The *Daily Telegraph* had the front-page headline:

'IRA speakers cheered in park rally'

The *Daily Express* declared that

'The rally was one of the strongest public displays of support for the Republican campaign in recent years.'

While the *Daily Mirror* called it

'The biggest show of Republican support since the Army began their security duties in 1969.'

So the IRA Volunteer had predicted correctly when he had declared at the rally that

'if the media honestly reports the numbers of people who turned out this afternoon, then maybe we shall be finished with Brit propaganda which says that the IRA are isolated from the people...'

Now the constant nightmare for British imperialism looms as a possibility. The nightmare that the British working class will see the Irish war for what it really is — a just struggle of the Irish working class to free itself from British oppression. It is becoming as clear as daylight that this is the truth. What now can stop the growing sympathy among British workers for the Republican Movement?

Just when all hope seems lost for British imperialism, just when the battlelines at last are revealed and it seems that sides must be taken in the final act, a faithful band of roving players leaps on to the scene. To confuse the issue they proceed to stage a charade to divert attention from the real battle. This is the role of the British petit bourgeois left on the Young Liberals march in London on August 12th.

On the streets of London that day, a grotesque parody of the Belfast march was acted out. At the head of the march, in the place of the IRA colour party was a bunch of MPs, Lords and do-gooders, all of whom would like nothing better than to see the Republican Movement crushed. In their ranks was Kevin McNamara MP, who walked out of a BBC TV programme in protest at the participation of Ruari O Bradaigh, President of Provisional Sinn Fein. McNamara can also boast of likening the IRA and INLA to 'rapists, burglars and murderers' in a recent Parliamentary debate. Also present was Leo Abse, a former supporter of the pro-imperialist

Peace People, and Cyril Smith MP, who recently voted in Parliament for the return of hanging.

Following behind this gang of hypocrites were the massed ranks of the petit bourgeois left. They were all represented. From the CPGB and NCP, who have censored previous marches on Ireland from their papers, through to the IMG, SWP, and UTOM, who in 1978 held a counter-demonstration when Provisional Sinn Fein marched on Bloody Sunday. Those who had refused to support the principled Prisoners Aid Committee marches last year, or had to be cajoled and bullied into dragging some members along, were out in force behind the liberal ruling class on August 12th.

The British ruling class certainly appreciate the work of their junior members and the petit bourgeois socialists. The *Guardian* for instance censored out of existence last year's principled PAC march. But it had two major articles on the Young Liberals 'demo'! It grossly exaggerated the numbers on the march by having the headline: '10,000 in march for Ulster pull-out'. It praised the organisers for keeping the demonstration as broad-based as possible. The organisers were commiserated with because 'Trafalgar Square had been denied to them'. (*Guardian* 13.8.79). This imperialist newspaper has supported each act of intimidation, terror and murder carried out by the British state. But it seemed to be on the most convivial terms with the organisers of the march, sharing their problems, taking a sympathetic interest in their fortunes. Why? Because the *Guardian* could see how the march defended ruling class interests — it could head off support for the Republican movement from the British working class, and prevent the unity of British and Irish workers that it fears most! This was the role the petit bourgeois socialists were playing.

So total was the awe of the petit bourgeois socialists for the Young Liberals, that no protest was made when Provisional Sinn Fein were forced to move their H-Block cage to the back of the march. The symbol of the very focus of the Irish resistance was pushed into the background without a murmur from these self-styled 'revolutionaries'. Again they showed their metal when Provisional Sinn Fein was denied speaking rights. When Michael Holden, of Provisional Sinn Fein, was finally allowed to speak, he was announced as 'a member of Hemel Hempstead Trades Council' who would 'speak for himself'. Again not a protest from the 'Troops Out Now' contingent, who constituted a majority of the march. Their 'Troops Out Now' banners meant nothing when it came to defending the Republican Movement. In fact their concern was to distract attention from the Republican Movement at this critical time. Just when the British state is suffering defeat after defeat, just when the sides in

the war are becoming clearly delineated for all to see, our petit bourgeois socialists want to push the Republican Movement into obscurity.

Why is it that British imperialism can always rely on these allies to come to its aid? Who are these forces that are anti-imperialist in word and pro-imperialist in deeds? The British petit bourgeoisie, from whom these so-called 'socialists' are drawn, are a class fraught with contradictions. They are neither of the working class nor of the ruling class. Their privileges, which they owe to imperialism, are not secure, like those of the bourgeoisie. They back their pay-masters to the hilt, but hold in horror the extremes of imperialism which threaten to bring chaos and an end to their cosy existence. This is why they abhor the war in Ireland, but dread just as much the victory of the Republican forces — the precondition for ending that war.

It is for these reasons that the petit bourgeois left plead with their ruling class:

'End the war'
(*Socialist Challenge* 30.8.79)

Hands Off Ireland! wants to see the war ended too — it has meant incalculable misery and suffering for tens of thousands of nationalist families in the Six Counties. But that misery and suffering will only cease for good if the Provisional Republicans win the war. This is why we celebrate the victories of the Republican movement. The petit bourgeois left however want 'peace':

'Peace has not come' (UTOM leaflet)
they moan. Any peace will do — so long as the instability that threatens their privileges is ended. Would they be happy if British guns and British terror had succeeded in bringing 'peace' to the Irish people over the past ten years? The pacifism of the petit bourgeois left is not 'misguided' or 'well-meaning'. It sides with imperialism and it *prolongs* the suffering of the Irish people.

The last 10 years have proved that the 'political solution' is as often sought and as rarely sighted as the abominable snowman. The war can only end in victory for one side or the other. But these pseudo-socialists refuse to call for a victory for the Irish people. Nothing was further from their lips on August 12th. Neither do they call for a victory for British imperialism. They cannot openly side with imperialism or the liberation forces. The anti-war slogan has no *practical meaning* at all. But it has a *real function* to play: to divert attention from the real issue of which side in the war to support.

But what of the slogan 'Troops Out Now', flaunted by the petit bourgeois socialists as their revolutionary credentials? In this pacifist context 'Troops Out Now' is equally meaningless. The troops will only be withdrawn when the Republican Movement is totally victorious, or if it is totally defeat-

ed. Together with unconditional support for the Republican Movement, 'Troops Out Now' is a principled slogan. Without this, it becomes a hypocritical cover for cowardly pacifism.

True enough, pacifism will win these opportunists some friends. They will not feel so lonely and insecure. But what friends! *Socialist Worker* hailed the August 12th march in London as the 'biggest and broadest' for many years. But who were these 'broad' layers? This demonstration had *fewer* trade union banners and *fewer* Irish workers than the PAC marches of last year. What it *did* have, marching at its head, was the 'liberal' section of the ruling class, with labour and trade union bureaucrats, as usual, closely in tow. They say you can tell a man by the company he keeps!

While the ruling class humoured the petit bourgeoisie in London, it made every attempt to sabotage the march in Belfast. The night before, the Ulster Organiser and the National Education Officer of Provisional Sinn Fein were seized. On the morning of the march, the public address system was confiscated. John Deery, a blanketman released from the H-Blocks, who was due to speak at the rally, was temporarily arrested. The Falls Road area was sealed off by the British army, and many buses arriving for the march were prevented from reaching it. The British forces were unable to come near the march itself, but in frustration they flew helicopters low over the rally in an unsuccessful attempt to drown out the speakers.

The British state makes it clear to all the world who is the enemy of the Irish people. But who are their friends? On August 12th in Casement Park, Belfast, thousands of workers cheered wildly as messages of support were announced from all over the world. From the South West Africa Peoples Organisation; from the Palestine Liberation Organisation; from the recently victorious Sandinistas in Nicaragua. All those who are struggling against imperialist oppression recognise the Provisional Republican Movement for what it is: the leadership of a risen people.

On August 12th the battlelines of the future were being drawn. In London one sort of unity was being forged: the unity of those who cover up for British imperialism. In Belfast there was another sort of unity: that of the international working class against imperialism. *Hands Off Ireland*, the only British contingent in Belfast that day, was proud to be part of that unity. We will do everything in our power to expose the sham socialists in Britain and win the British working class to the anti-imperialist camp.

Diane Fox

HANDS OFF IRELAND NEWS

OXFORD MARCH FOR IRISH PRISONERS

On October 20 eight hundred people marched through Oxford behind the banners of the Provisional Sinn Fein. The march was called by Provisional Sinn Fein to highlight the British state's barbaric treatment of Irish POWs. The demands of the demonstration were 'Prisoner of War status for Irish republican prisoners' and 'Repatriate Irish prisoners in English gaols'. The march was led by the James Connolly Flute Band from Glasgow — they played stirring republican music throughout and made a major contribution to the success of the march.

By far the largest contingents were those of the Provisional Sinn Fein and Hands Off Ireland. The IRSP also had a strong presence. Together these contingents made up the bulk of the march. There were trade union banners from the NUJ Magazine branch, SW London TGWU/ACTSS and from two Oxford branches of the TGWU. There were tiny contingents from the British petit-bourgeois left: the WSL, the SWP, the IMG, the RCT, Women and Ireland and UTOM. The rally afterwards was held just outside Oxford city centre. Jim Reilly chaired the rally. He noted the lack of support for the Sinn Fein demonstration from the British 'trendy left'. This lack of support was underlined as the rally went on — members of British petit bourgeois left organisations who had marched at the rear of the demonstration either talked amongst themselves during the speeches, or sloped off home before the end. This attitude was a sharp contrast to that of the Glasgow contingent who had travelled overnight to get to the march or the couple who travelled up from Devon arriving in London in the early hours of Saturday morning to join the London coach to the demonstration.

Mary MacDermott spoke for Belfast PSF. She told the audience about the disgusting conditions facing the men in H-Block and she read out a letter from one of the men on the blanket. Gerry Cassidy from An Cumann Cabhrach gave a militant republican speech and received loud cheers at the end. Kevin Colfer of London Provisional Sinn Fein told the National Front thugs who had followed the march in the hope of picking off stragglers that the Provisional Republican Movement would destroy them just as it would destroy British imperialism's occupation of Ireland. He also warned British petit bourgeois left organi-

sations not to attempt to split the republican movement for their own sectarian ends.

Terry Marlowe spoke on behalf of Hands Off Ireland. He pledged the support of Hands Off Ireland for the Irish people's struggle and called for the total defeat of British imperialism. He stated that Hands Off Ireland had every confidence that the men on the blanket would not give up their struggle until they had won their just demands, and that the Irish people would not give up their struggle until British imperialism had been driven out of Ireland. Maura McCrory spoke for the Relatives Action Committee. She made a moving and passionate speech. She said the Irish people would never be defeated by British imperialism. She demanded that the people at the rally take the issue into their workplaces and that they fight for an end to the British occupation too. The audience applauded rapturously. The Chair welcomed a speaker from the IRSP to the platform. She stressed the importance of taking the issue into the British working class and winning support there. There were also speakers from the Oxford Irish Delegation, Women and Ireland and UTOM.

One striking feature of the march was the comparison with August 12th. In Oxford

there were approximately thirty individuals on the SWP and IMG contingents and double this figure on the UTOM contingent. Yet they had managed to mobilise several thousands for the August 12th demonstration! Why this great difference in turn-out? Where were the thousands who marched on August 12th?

The answer was simple enough. They had mobilised their membership for the August 12th march because it was organised and led by the Young Liberals. It was not a march that sided with the Irish people against the British state. But the Oxford march was totally different. It was a Provisional Sinn Fein march. The British petit bourgeois left will not and cannot provide anything more than a token representation for a march that opposes British imperialism.

But this absence of real support from the British petit bourgeois left did not detract from the success of the march. Thousands of Oxford people lined the route, saw the support that exists for the Provisional Sinn Fein, heard the demands of the march and were given H-Block leaflets. Some of the shoppers — especially black people — saluted the march with clenched fists. About fifty local youths joined in with the





march. The National Front could only mobilise a handful of clowns who were unable to do anything except stand in the gutter and scream abuse, and wave a dirty and tatty union jack at the marchers. An article in the 'Oxford Mail' condemning the march and police attempts at sabotaging the dispersal at the end also failed to cause any trouble. The strength and commitment to the victory of the Republican movement of those on the march made it a great success. Indeed many people looked forward with confidence to the next demonstration.

PRESS SCARE SABOTAGES IRELAND MEETING

An alliance between the millionaire press and the opportunist leadership of the British labour movement has successfully prevented a chance of British workers hearing the views of Provisional Sinn Fein at first hand. At its September meeting, the Runcorn and Widnes Trades Council had accepted a proposal from a Hands Off Ireland supporter to hold a public meeting, at which the film *The Patriot Game* would have been shown, and a speaker from Provisional Sinn Fein invited.

Immediately the *Widnes Weekly News* had heard of it, it launched a vicious campaign against it, in association with some opportunists on the Trade Council. These last showed their absolute cowardice. They 'represented' unions whose members are hounded by the press whenever they take industrial action, abused as 'wreckers', 'murderers' and 'enemies of democracy', especially if they were involved in the strikes by hospital and council workers last winter for a living wage. Yet these 'leaders' felt no qualms about working in close co-

operation with the ruling class press when it came to Ireland. They were as anxious as the newspaper barons to suppress the views of Provisional Sinn Fein, and prevent British workers from listening to them. So they turned out en masse for the October meeting of the Trades Council, to successfully overturn the decision by 23 votes to 8. " 'IRA' INVITE KICKED OUT" shrieked the banner headline of the *Runcorn Weekly News* two days later. And the *Runcorn Guardian*, which had missed out on the story, is now making up lost ground by conducting a witch hunt against the delegate who had proposed the meeting, to get him sacked by his employers, the Civil Service. If one individual can create such hysteria amongst the ruling class and its henchmen in the working class, there can be no surprise about the systematic attempt by police to break up street meetings on Ireland, in Glasgow and Cardiff, or by local councils in Manchester and Blackburn to ban meetings on the issue in their halls. For they fear the inevitable: a revolutionary alliance between British workers and the Irish liberation movement.

BRISTOL—MEETING ATTACKED

On October 16th a Hands Off Ireland meeting in Bristol took place to build for the Provisional Sinn Fein demonstration in Oxford the next Saturday. It took place in conditions of siege. National Front members were outside and there was the threat of an attack from forty soldiers of the local 'Glorious Glosters' regiment. Half-way through the meeting there was a bomb scare and the building had to be quickly searched by the stewards.

The cause of all this was a hysterical front

page article in a local weekly newspaper the *Bristol Journal*, five days before. The banner headline announced: 'STORM ERUPTS IN CITY OVER IRA SHOW'. But what was this storm? Nobody had heard anything of this storm until the appearance of the *Bristol Journal*. It was in fact a purely artificial storm manufactured by this newspaper in order to try and get the Hands Off Ireland meeting banned and prevent the Provisional Sinn Fein speaker from speaking in Bristol.

The article tried to pretend the meeting was more or less illegal. It called the meeting at which the film 'The Patriot Game' was shown, an 'IRA show'. Thus it tried to give the police the pretext for banning the meeting. The newspaper also phoned up the owners of the hall where the meeting was to be held and tried to frighten them into cancelling the meeting. To do this they told lies about who was organising the meeting.

The aim of the article was to try and isolate Hands Off Ireland and Provisional Sinn Fein from everybody else in Bristol. Thus local dignitaries were approached for quotations. William Waldegrave, Conservative MP said:

'It is a deliberate insult coming in the wake of the Mountbatten outrage'

Arthur Palmer, Labour MP, said:

'I can hardly imagine any meeting held to further the cause of extremists in Northern Ireland will get much support'

Father Patrick Leyden, Secretary to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Clifton, said:

'The Church would condemn this in the strongest possible terms.'

The impression was given that everybody was unanimous in opposing the meeting. Tony Benn, 'left' MP evaded the issue as usual by saying:

'We live in a country where people have a right to hold meetings'.

Such are the methods of British 'democracy'. The *British Journal* cared nothing about the violence which would occur if soldiers or NF thugs attacked the meeting. Indeed, they were actively encouraging it by the rabid tone of their front page article. Their aim was to prevent the meeting taking place by hook or by crook. The local businessmen who finance the *Bristol Journal* clearly recognise who their real enemies are — never has a left-wing meeting or a left-wing organisation in Bristol come under the kind of attack that the Provisional Sinn Fein and Hands Off Ireland were coming under.

But we are pleased to say that all these attempts to get the meeting stopped were defeated. The meeting took place as planned. A hundred people attended it and watched the film 'The Patriot Game'. A message of international solidarity was received from Confederation of Iranian Students National Union. £55 was collected from the audience — £10 was donated

to the H-Block Appeal Fund whilst the rest of this will finance the campaign we are mounting to destroy the British state's occupation of the Six Counties of 'Northern Ireland'. Members of the local SWP and IMG sent stewards to the meeting, although the ANL, Militant and the CP all refused. The audience — which was composed largely of Irish workers — were not intimidated by the hysterical press campaign. They heard the Hands Off Ireland speaker pledge Hands Off Ireland's unconditional support for the Irish people and the Provisional Republican Movement against the British state. They heard a rousing speech from the Provisional Sinn Fein speaker. He said that the Irish people would fight until victory had been won. In reply to the *Daily Telegraph's* recent claims that the British ruling class would not tolerate any 'Patriotic Fronts' in Ireland, he said that the Provisional Republican movement would not tolerate any 'Ian Smiths' in Ireland.

And so the attacks on the meeting failed dismally and the *Bristol Journal* was sent scurrying away with its tail between its legs. In fact, so humiliating was the defeat for the *Bristol Journal* that in its next issue it felt forced to print the reply Hands Off Ireland had written to the scurrilous article the week before. This reply laid bare the hypocrisy of the Waldegraves, Leydens and Palmers and called for the defeat of British imperialism in Ireland.

The meeting was the biggest left-wing meeting in Bristol for some time and certainly the biggest meeting on the question of Ireland for many years. This success shows what principled work in solidarity with the Irish people can achieve. It is in stark contrast to the long list of failures of the local UTOM which has now practically collapsed amidst demoralisation and despair. This successful meeting points the way forward for the future.

POLICE HARASSMENT IN CARDIFF

On Saturday 15 September two supporters of Hands Off Ireland and one member of Provisional Sinn Fein were arrested in Cardiff. Hands Off Ireland supporters have been harassed before by Cardiff police; we had been told that we could not continue to sell the bulletin in the shopping centre. The excuse given then was that we were causing an obstruction. These arrests took place at a street meeting outside Cardiff market. It was called by the Provisional Sinn Fein and supported by Hands Off Ireland and the Welsh Republican Clubs. It was called on the third anniversary of Kieran Nugent going on the blanket in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh concentration camp. It was an extremely successful street meeting. Within minutes of the meeting starting there were over 150 people

listening to the speeches, buying literature and giving donations. We sold 15 *Hands Off Ireland!* and sold out of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* in 15 minutes!

Meanwhile about 10 uniformed police and 4 plainclothes police had arrived; they tried to disperse the crowd but with no success. A plainclothes Detective Sergeant told us to stop speaking through the megaphone, then to stop talking to the crowd even without the megaphone and eventually threatened us with arrest if we didn't 'move on'. He said that our very presence alone was causing a breach of the peace! We refused to do this. Meanwhile police were collecting the names and addresses of the reactionary hecklers in the crowd and a white closed-back van had arrived. The Provisional Sinn Fein member and two Hands Off Ireland supporters were then arrested and taken away in the van to Cardiff City police station. They were held there for 3½ hours and charged under section 5 of the Public Order Act. The charge described the literature being sold as 'abusive and insulting'! Is it abusive and insulting to tell people about the struggle for political status in the H-Blocks, the murders by the SAS, the torture in the RUC barracks? To whom is it abusive and insulting? The police refused to give receipts for two bags containing literature which belonged to two of the people arrested.

Joint press releases from Hands Off Ireland and Provisional Sinn Fein were released the next day and phoned through to most of the national daily papers, and the local papers in Wales and the South West. The statement exposed the political nature of the arrests, it explained that while British 'democracy' in Ireland has always meant intimidation, torture and murder, so-called British democracy in this country means that the British state will attempt to

silence those who speak out in support of the Republican movement in their war against the British state. All the papers phoned took down the statement except the supposedly 'progressive' *Daily Mirror*. This is the paper whose call for the troops to be eventually withdrawn was hailed by the petit bourgeois socialist organisations such as the IMG, the SWP and the UTOM, as being 'progressive'. The *Western Mail*, the *Irish Post* and the *Morning Star* printed one paragraph. The *Socialist Challenge* and *Socialist Worker* said it was too late for that week's edition; we are certain no effort was made to include it.

Hands Off Ireland and the Provisional Sinn Fein refuse to be silenced or driven off the streets of Cardiff and called a rally for the following Saturday to protest at the arrests and continue to win support for the Irish side of the war. Support for the rally came from High Wycombe and South Wales Provisional Sinn Fein, London, Manchester and Bristol Hands Off Ireland and members of the SWP, Workers Action and UTOM. The NCP sent a message of support. The IMG not only refused to support the street meeting of the previous week, not only refused to let the rally be announced at a 'Pat Arrowsmith Benefit' they were organising earlier that week but also did not support the rally itself.

The protest rally was a victory. It was even more successful than the week before and there were no arrests. Throughout the rally there was a solid crowd of over 250 listening to the speeches given by speakers from Hands Off Ireland and Provisional Sinn Fein. 45 copies of the bulletin *Hands Off Ireland!* were sold and £20 was collected from the crowd in only 75 minutes! There was only one persistent heckler who though at first was encouraged by the police, had to be taken away from the meeting by the



police because of *lack* of support for his reactionary rantings from the rest of the crowd. The crowd was listening to the speeches explaining the level of repression directed at the nationalist working class of the Six Counties.

Attempts by the police to turn the crowd against us failed. Several incidents backfired on the police; an old lady came up to a Hands Off Ireland supporter who was collecting money and took out her purse. A reactionary woman who was standing nearby screamed at her, 'Don't give any money to her'. She's collecting for the IRA! Did you know that?' As the woman continued to take the money out of her purse a policeman who was also standing nearby said to her, 'Go on, ask her where the money goes to'. The old lady then turned round to face the policeman and the reactionary woman and shouted to them, 'I know what I'm giving my money to so mind your own bloody business!'

The police had attempted to stop the rally at 3.25pm, but this was ignored by the organisers who asserted their right to ensure that the people in Cardiff could hear the truth about the war in Ireland. When the rally ended at 3.45pm the police took the name and address of a Hands Off Ireland supporter and threatened to charge him for organising an 'Illegal assembly'. If this threat is carried out this charge too will be fought politically. We will continue to hold regular street meetings in Cardiff to prove that we will not be harassed off the streets and continue to win many more people to the movement opposed to British imperialism. The police were unable to make arrests because of the huge success of the rally, the size of and attentiveness of the crowd and the disciplined stewards.

Hands Off Ireland and Provisional Sinn Fein will be fighting the charges politically, they are political arrests. The British state is losing the war today in Ireland, the Republican movement has inflicted blow upon blow to the British state. As we mention elsewhere in the bulletin the execution of the 18 soldiers at Warrenpoint was the worst loss to the British Army since the Korean war. What the British state fears is that the working class in this country will be told the truth about the war in Ireland because it knows that they would then side with the Irish in their war of liberation. It fears a growing movement in this country against British imperialism in Ireland.

In *Hands Off Ireland!* no8, we said that 'the increasing success of *Hands Off Ireland!* has attracted the attention of the British state'. We can have no doubt that this is now the case; the more we pose a threat to British imperialism the more we can expect harassments such as these arrests. But we will not accept them. We are already building a campaign around these arrests which will allow us to continue our meetings on the streets in Cardiff. We are

holding a rally on the 10 November in Cardiff and we will be picketing the hearing of the three arrested on the 13 November.

LONDON—RCT SABOTAGE DEFEATED

For more than two years now Hands Off Ireland has been involved in street meetings on Ireland in Kilburn Square in London. On Saturday 13 October we had arranged with Provisional Sinn Fein to hold a joint Provisional Sinn Fein/Hands Off Ireland meeting in the Square at 11.00 am to mobilise for the Provisional Sinn Fein march in Oxford the following Saturday. Yet when our comrades arrived in Kilburn Square they found that the RCT had set up their own rival street meeting knowing that Provisional Sinn Fein/Hands Off Ireland had arranged to hold a meeting in that place at that time. It soon became apparent that the primary purpose of the RCT meeting was to attract support for their own 'national' demonstration in London in November and not to build for the Provisional Sinn Fein march.

We gave the RCT until 11.15 to vacate the Square (thus giving them the opportunity to resolve the matter without disruption). They refused. We therefore moved in at 11.15 to remove their equipment in order to allow the planned Provisional Sinn Fein/Hands Off Ireland meeting to go ahead. Their response was to launch a hysterical and violent attack on our comrades obliging us to use force to clear the Square. Our comrades defended themselves and quickly cleared the Square of the RCT sectarians. The RCT followed up their defeated act of sabotage later the same day when two of their members attacked a lone member of the Revolutionary Communist Group in another part of London.

Despite the attempted sabotage the planned meeting went ahead and was very successful in attracting interest in the Oxford march. However, thanks to the RCT, the police were called to the Square and are now demanding two days notice of any meetings. This increased police control and harassment is the direct responsibility of the RCT sectarians.

Having failed in London the RCT then disrupted a public meeting in Leeds. Once again this meeting was designed to build support for the Oxford march. The total contribution of the RCT to the Provisional Sinn Fein was this: attempted disruption of meeting in London on 13 October, successful disruption of meeting in Leeds on 18 October, and holding their *own* street meeting for their *own* march on the very day of the Oxford march! This was held in Manchester. Their pathetic contingent of 30 on 20 October was ample evidence of their refusal to build for the Oxford march.

Hands Off Ireland wishes to make it clear to all who may be concerned that we will

not allow anyone or any group to disrupt and sabotage our work in solidarity with the Irish people's struggle against British imperialism. In the past three months we have had meetings attacked by the National Front in Manchester and loyalists in Edinburgh. We have had comrades arrested in Cardiff and Glasgow and meetings broken up by the police in both these areas. We have had press campaigns waged against us in Bristol and Runcorn. We now have comrades whose jobs are threatened as a result of these attacks. The RCT have joined with the police and the National Front in attacks on Hands Off Ireland. In Cardiff it was the police, in Manchester it was the National Front, and in Kilburn it was the RCT. We will defend ourselves and our work against any attack from any quarter whatever. The facts of the incident in Kilburn Square are clear and the responsibility for that incident lies entirely with the sectarian sabotage activity of the RCT. We urge all comrades to guard against this sectarian anti-Republican grouping.

GLASGOW BAN DEFIED

Hands Off Ireland, with the support of Glasgow Provisional Sinn Fein, planned to hold a rally in the Blackhill district of Glasgow. The purpose of the rally was to publicise the Provisional Sinn Fein march in Oxford.

Obstruction after obstruction was carried out by the Glasgow police and City Council. The Glasgow police initially gave permission for the rally but passed us onto the City Council for permission to use a piece of waste ground as the rally point. Predictably the City Council refused us permission to use a patch of empty ground for two hours for a rally. The actual body responsible for this refusal was the Building and Maintenance sub-committee which includes Labour councillors – Kernaghan, Stobo, Ennis, Hamilton, Macrae and Mason – as well as Scottish Nationalists – Johnson, Kennedy and McClean. This alliance of Labour pro-imperialists and bourgeois nationalists ensured that our request was refused.

We were thus forced to hold the rally in the street. The same street where, a few weeks previously, a Hands Off Ireland supporter was arrested for 'obstruction'. However, at this point, the police *withdrew* their permission for the rally. Hands Off Ireland supporters responded with a campaign of leafletting, press statements, letters to the councillors and MPs involved – all of which made absolutely clear that we would go ahead with our rally with or without police permission.

The rally went ahead on 13 October. Once again Hands Off Ireland demonstrated that it will not allow its work to be disrupted by arbitrary police action. In the event the police were not able to take any action against the rally which passed off without incident.

THE STRUGGLE IN ZIMBABWE

On August 12 this year, Hands Off Ireland organised a very successful rally held in Unity House, London, calling for victory to the Irish people. The meeting began with over 200 people seeing the film 'The Patriot Game'. One of the high points of the evening was the speech given by Harold Ndlovu of the ZAPU wing of the Patriotic Front. The appearance of a Patriotic Front representative on a platform with Provisional Sinn Fein was, in itself, a remarkable and important event. We reprint below an edited version of comrade Ndlovu's speech. We thank comrade Ndlovu for allowing us to reprint his speech. We take this opportunity to send our greetings and solidarity to the freedom fighters of the Patriotic Front — Victory to the Zimbabwean people!

First of all, when I looked at the film, which was shown tonight, it was like seeing a film on Zimbabwe. It was so identical — except that the people who were being beaten were also white. That made a difference. In our situation, those you see being pulled by the hair, those you see being shot and killed by the soldiers, are all, to all intent and purposes, black. Those who are carrying sticks and hitting, killing, to all intent and purposes, are white. (Of course, they have got a few of the black people who have been corrupted who are carrying out the same brutality.) It was like watching what is happening in Zimbabwe except for that difference of colour. At a certain stage in our struggle, when we found ourselves in that situation, we began to think that all white people must be really evil: that there was no white man who can be good in the world, because all the white men that we have in our country are doing exactly what you saw in the film today, and our people began to believe that our struggle was a struggle against white people. You could not blame them because whatever happened, whatever took place which deprived people's basic human rights, was done by white people. But as of now, I am pleased to say, our people have begun to realise that it is something more than that. It is something greater than that. It is the evilness of capitalism.

When I looked at the film and saw how the people of Ireland have developed their struggle to the present day, to a time whereby the leadership of the IRA talked with the Minister and discussed the question of a cease-fire, the British government had begun to realise that the Irish people were serious: the Irish people had a certain vanguard which was waging the war against British imperialism. As you very well know we, in Zimbabwe, are engaged in a similar struggle to that of the people in Ireland fighting British imperialism. We have been fighting against this imperialism for a very long time. Of course, not as long as the Irish people — the Irish people have been under British oppression and exploitation for about 800 years. We have been under them for a period of just less than a century. But our struggle has so many similarities that if one were to itemise them I think that could become the basis of the whole talk today — just to itemise the similarities. Nonetheless, I would like to say a few words about our situation.

As I have said, we have been under British colonialism for just under a century. We have been resisting this exploitation. We have been resisting this oppression in various different forms — we have resisted it peacefully. But all that we got from our peaceful resistance was arrest, detention, torture and being killed. In Zimbabwe we at a certain time when we got to know what was happening in Ireland, at some stage, we thought that the Irish people were lucky! At least the British imperialists are using rubber bullets! In our country they never think of using rubber bullets. They always used real bullets and killed as many as they could. But, anyway, we had been struggling peacefully and did the best that we could to demonstrate our objection to British oppression. But to no avail. Our leaders were arrested and locked up in detention — everything was done by the imperialistic powers with the help of their imperialist allies to ensure that they destroyed the aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe. So as to ensure the capitalist got the maximum profits for themselves using the resources of our country. Things went on until we came to a stage whereby we decided that maybe the best thing is to answer back not with stones — we saw people in the film

throwing stones and they were answered with real bullets, they were shot and killed — in Zimbabwe we were also using stones. We were throwing stones and we were shot and we were killed. We took to mass rallies, mass political organisations. We were arrested, we were detained; we were tortured, we were killed. Then we decided that maybe what we needed to do was to take the gun and speak the language of the imperialist so that maybe they can understand. And certainly it did work and is working.

When that language was beginning to work our fellow comrades in Mozambique, our fellow comrades in Angola were also doing the same and they succeeded. Their success marked a change in the policy of the imperialist with regard to southern Africa. Their success meant that socialist states were now being established in that part of the world. The imperialists knew that we had received assistance in terms of weapons from the socialist countries. They also knew that our cadres had received their military training in socialist countries. They also knew that our party was transforming from a nationalist organisation to a revolutionary organisation. They also knew that our cadres, most of them, were convinced insofar as establishing a socialist state in Zimbabwe was concerned. They then realised that a danger to their profits, a danger to their investments, was imminent in the light of the developments in Mozambique and Angola. Then they decided they must do something to arrest our progress. Hence the Americans began to come in through Dr Henry Kissinger. The Americans, the British and other capitalist states came together to say 'No, this is very serious, this is dangerous ... we had better do something, we had better change tactics, but still aiming for the same goal'. And so they created what is known as the Anglo-American proposals.

A conference took place in Geneva and it became clear that the capitalists only wanted to create a different arrangement to perpetuate the same thing — hence the conference flopped. You are also aware of several other conferences which have taken place to try to solve what is now known as the Rhodesian problem. You are aware that in 1971 Sir Alec Douglas-Home made an

agreement with Ian Smith on what he called a settlement proposal. But one mistake which they made was to forget that, for that to have been agreed, the people of Zimbabwe as a whole had to say yes. They knew that for more than ten years they had locked up the leaders of the people of Zimbabwe in detention camps so they thought that there was no political activity in the country. They decided that Lord Pearce would just go and formalise this arrangement. I need not tell you that those proposals were rejected by our people. I need not tell you also that these imperialists continue to make these efforts. The Geneva arrangement was one such additional effort. Ian Smith has made several settlements. One settlement which he made was to declare the UDI. He thought that was the best way to safeguard the interests of the capitalists. It didn't work. Then he brought chiefs into his Cabinet—black chiefs: it didn't work. Then he went on to declare a new Constitution in 1969—a Republic. It didn't work. Several settlements have been made—they never worked. And the last of them is one which you know, whereby they persuaded some disgruntled Zimbabweans (it's a pity they are Zimbabweans, but of course they are Zimbabweans), who had been rejected by the people, to fall in with an arrangement, which is now known as the 'internal settlement' which people sometimes refer to as the Muzorewa government.

The Bishop found himself unacceptable to the Freedom Fighters and decided he had to go to Ian Smith and see if Smith would accept him. Therefore Smith gave him certain terms which he accepted and a settlement came into being. They even went as far as drawing up what they called a Constitution. Funnily enough they only asked the white electorate to decide whether they accepted that Constitution. Of course the whites accepted it because it safeguarded their interests! They didn't bother to ask the blacks. All *they* had to do was to come and vote—not even vote for individual candidates. No, they brought everybody together, and said 'you are voting for this party'. They worked out some final arrangement whereby they stamped you because they didn't even have a voting roll—they didn't have the names. They had to stamp you with something to show you had voted, but something invisible which no one can see except under a special machine; because if people saw you had voted, if the Freedom Fighters saw you had voted, I am sorry that would be the end of you. So they had to devise all such tactics. They had to get lorries, get employers, get everybody to help get the people to the polls to go and vote, because that was believed to be the salvation of that system. The more people you get into the polling station the better for the international community, because the international community is going to say the people of Zimbabwe have voted demo-

cratically and elected a government. Some of those for the arrangement came to a point whereby they were given more than 100 per cent votes in certain areas—more than 100 per cent! That's a very funny unscientific figure. Various explanations were made and the Conservative party and various others have been trying to say this was a fair and free election.

The main point is that now they had black people in the government, one of whom was called Prime Minister, but unfortunately they also put it in writing that this government would not have any power. They made it clear that this government would have no power over the army. They had a certain commission which would look into that. This government had no power over the police—they too would answer to a commission. This government really didn't—doesn't—have any power, but anyway the good black people had a black Prime Minister, they had Ministers of Finance, Foreign Ministers. Fortunately the international community realised the futility of this and have brought pressure to bear; to realise that this was a fault. We have done our part and our part has been on the battlefield.

I know that you don't read about the work we do at the front. There are positive reasons why the capitalist press wouldn't write it, but we have done our job. In spite of the Conservatives having declared they would recognise the regime (and lift sanctions), to their surprise they found that the actual reality when they came to power were different from what they thought in opposition. When they actually got into power the OAU declared its unanimous support of the Patriotic Front. Margaret Thatcher went to Zambia with certain plans but found that the actual realities of the situation were such that the Conservatives could not go on with their declared policy. So now they have come out with a different one. This Constitution which is to be drawn up, the elections which, it is said, are to be supervised by Britain, has been accepted in principle by the Commonwealth. The Patriotic Front, as you all know, comrades, was not part and parcel of the Commonwealth Conference. The Patriotic Front did not take part in drawing up these terms. They were drawn up by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. The Patriotic Front will certainly look into it, will certainly participate in the conference which has been called but that doesn't guarantee that what will be drawn up will be accepted by the Patriotic Front. We know that insofar as the British are concerned there is something called 'small print' which is most important. They can make all the generalisations they like but, when it comes to the final analysis, there is the 'small print'. You have been reading in the press of various explanations and techniques which the Conservatives have got in mind, but I can assure you that the Patriotic Front stands

for a fair and free election in Zimbabwe, in the process of establishing a socialist state in Zimbabwe. But handling that election cannot be done under the present arrangement. There can be no free and fair election under the present government. That is out. We rejected the Geneva things on the question of security, on the question of who actually, insofar as security is concerned, will be involved at the time of the election. We hope that if Margaret Thatcher has really changed, that that fundamental point will really be looked to and accommodated, because, as of now, different from the '60s, we have got an armed force who can run the country at any time. We need no British supervision. We are fighting the British imperialists, mind you, and if we are fighting British imperialists, how can they come and supervise us? We are fighting them. You have been told that the Patriotic Front will participate by various leaders in Africa, with whom we have various relations, with whom we are in contact but that does not mean that we will accept any new puppet arrangement that can be devised under a new Constitution. Our people have suffered, lost their lives, died—not to have the same arrangement going on under a different name. If Margaret Thatcher thinks she can pull a fast one on us then, I'm sorry, that won't work.

Thank you comrades ...

Harold Ndlovu
Patriotic Front (ZAPU)

FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

ISSUE ONE NOW OUT

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is a regular publication building support for the growing resistance to British imperialism and its racist offensive. There will be regular articles on the struggles of black people against racism, the British state and immigration controls, racist attacks, the heroic struggles of liberation movements against imperialism and information on anti-racist and anti imperialist activities.

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There are also reports on racist attacks, police harassment, activities in support of the struggle against racism and imperialism.

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COMMUNISM AND REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM

Throughout the history of the struggle for Irish national liberation, there have been 'socialists' who have attacked that struggle as a diversion from the 'real' 'socialist' struggle. Today, as readers of *Hands Off Ireland!* will be aware, these attacks are commonplace throughout the British petit bourgeois left. All of these attacks are mounted in the name of Marxism. This claim is a shabby lie designed to disguise the pro-imperialist character of these petit bourgeois organisations. The activities of these organisations, and their counterparts in Ireland, have been, and are, so pervasive that they have caused the title 'communist' to stink in the nostrils of many of the oppressed people. It was the Officials, the self-styled 'scientific socialists' within the Republican movement, who rendered that movement incapable of responding to the attacks on the nationalist working class in 1969. Just as it was the 'International Socialists' (now the Socialist Workers' Party) who welcomed the occupation of the Six Counties by the army of British imperialism, saying

'The intervention of the British troops ... allows a temporary breathing space in which the defence of the Catholic community can be strengthened.' (*Socialist Worker*, Editorial, 21 August 1969)

The history of betrayal, cowardice and abuse of national liberation movements from the British petit bourgeois left obliges us to state clearly the true relationship between the revolutionary national struggle of the Irish people and communism.

The basic issue at stake in the Irish war is the democratic right of the Irish people to self-determination. It is the denial of this right, backed by all the force and barbarity at the disposal of British imperialism, which is the cause of the present war in Ireland. The imposition of partition brought about by an alliance of British imperialism and Irish capitalists in the 1920s is the root cause of the present division of the Irish working class and the foundation stone of the strength of British imperialism in Ireland not only in the Six Counties but throughout Ireland. Every issue which confronts the Irish working class leads inevitably to the issue of Irish national self-determination.

This fact *alone* makes the revolutionary

role of the Irish national liberation movement clear: that movement is defending and advancing the basic fundamental interests of the Irish working class. The evidence for this need not be sought in textbooks but lies in the history of the last ten years of imperialist war against the Irish people. At the turn of 1969/1970, the Provisional Republican movement had just split from the Official Republican movement. The Provisionals had next to nothing in the way of material resources — their only significant resource was the determination of their members to seize the opportunity which had opened up to once again launch an anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. Today, without any doubt whatsoever, the Provisional Republican movement represents the vanguard of the Irish people's struggle against British imperialism. All those organisations which argued in 1969 that the way forward was a peaceful struggle for reform within the Six County statelet, all those organisations which minimised or denied the significance of the national question for the Irish working class are completely irrelevant today. The Official movement (now called Sinn Féin — The Workers' Party) is reduced to a rump organisation begging for crumbs at the table of British imperialism. The explanation for this development is simply that it was the Provisionals, and the Provisionals alone, who recognised that it was impossible to defend the interests of the Irish working class without fighting against the national oppression of the Irish people by British imperialism.

By adopting this position the Provisional Republican movement was adopting the revolutionary position. The strength of British imperialism is derived from the oppression and exploitation of peoples throughout the world. This oppression and exploitation is the basis of imperialism which has divided the world into oppressed and oppressor nations so that a handful of advanced capitalist nations exploit numerous backward capitalist countries, impoverishing them and holding back their development. The price for this domination is paid by the masses in these countries who are condemned to brutal exploitation, poverty and unemployment whilst living under the most vicious and reactionary regimes.

The grip of British imperialism over the

Irish people is such that a nation which has the agricultural and industrial basis for an enormous expansion of production and raising of the standard of living for the whole working class, suffers from continual and extremely high levels of unemployment and poverty. Both north and south of the imperialist border, the Irish people suffer repression on a scale not to be found elsewhere in 'free' Europe. The brutality directed against the Civil Rights campaign in 1968 showed, to those who were willing to see, that British imperialism could not concede even minimal civil rights to the nationalist working class. The lesson of these last ten years is clear: the only road to the socialist revolution in Ireland is through the struggle against British imperialism: the struggle for self-determination.

It is this reality which places the question of Irish national liberation at the centre of attention of revolutionaries in Britain. The essence of imperialism is the division between oppressed and oppressor nations. The fight against national oppression is, therefore, the starting point of the revolutionary struggle today. The wars of national liberation in Ireland, and throughout the world, are not merely one cause among many, they strike at the heart of the imperialist system. Thus when we in Britain declare our support for the right of self-determination for the Irish people we are acting as revolutionaries recognising that there can be no question of a successful fight against the British ruling class that is not firmly based on an anti-imperialist position. The demand for self-determination in Ireland is directed against the central barrier to the emancipation of the Irish working class — British imperialism. This is why Lenin wrote:

'National self-determination is the same as the struggle for complete national liberation, for complete independence, against annexation, and socialists *cannot* — without ceasing to be socialists — reject *such* a struggle in whatever form, right down to an uprising or war'

As communists we are committed to the struggle for socialism in Britain. Everything we do is geared to the end of bringing about the socialist revolution in Britain. The struggle for national liberation in Ireland is

not a diversion from the struggle for socialism in Britain but a central part of bringing it about. The fight for national independence in Ireland is not only necessary for the *Irish* working class, it is also necessary for the *British* working class.

We have frequently quoted a particular remark from Marx, we make no apology for quoting it again:

'It is a precondition to the emancipation of the English working class to transform the present forced union (ie the enslavement of Ireland) into equal and free confederation if possible, into complete separation if need be'

Half-a-century later Lenin underlined this position when he wrote:

'this demand [the demand for Irish freedom] alone presented a consistently revolutionary programme; it alone was in accord with internationalism'

Both Marx and Lenin understood the intimate connection between the national struggle in Ireland and the socialist revolution. British imperialism could not then, and cannot today, grant independence to the Irish people because its system is based on imperialist domination and it will not voluntarily give up its power to dominate. This alone explains the ruthlessness and determination of British imperialism in Ireland. The British ruling class knows that a victory in Ireland will spur on the liberation movements in Africa and elsewhere, will weaken its hold over oppressed peoples and will weaken its ability to hold down the working class in Britain. Therefore the demand for Irish self-determination stands at the heart of the revolutionary struggle in Britain. This is why we unconditionally support the right of the Irish people to self-determination.

Communists and national liberation movements

There are, in fact, few in Britain who openly deny that right. However there are all too many who, whilst supporting the right of Irish self-determination, *oppose* those Irish people who are organised in a movement which is actually fighting for that right. Readers of *Hands Off Ireland!* will by now be familiar with these people. We have all heard them: 'I support the struggle in Ireland but ...' The 'I support but ...' school is dominant throughout the British petit bourgeois left. This 'but' is usually introduced when it comes to the issue of national liberation movements. One can support *in general* the right of self-determination without ever leaving one's armchair—the trouble starts when the oppressed take up arms against their oppression.

This is another area where the activities of petit bourgeois socialists have given communism a foul reputation among oppressed people. But in fact from what we have already said it is clear that the struggle of

national liberation movements is a genuinely revolutionary struggle against imperialism, against oppression, against poverty, unemployment and starvation. And communists in the oppressor nations cannot stand aside from such struggles, mouthing foolish phrases about 'militarism' 'petit bourgeois nationalism' 'elitism' etc etc. Lenin confronted the same stupidities at the time of the Easter Rising. From the standpoint of hindsight it is easy for us to see that the Easter Rising was nothing but the opening shot in what became the war of independence, then the civil war, and, finally, today's struggle. But Lenin understood at the time the enormous significance of the Easter Rising and its revolutionary progressive content.

The Easter Rising was described by one left-wing section of the socialist movement as a 'putsch' and condemned. Trotsky drew the following conclusion from the Rising 'The experiment of an Irish national rebellion... is over'. It was only Lenin in the revolutionary movement who recognised what the Rising represented. In this recognition he was only explaining to others what the Irish people knew already. Lenin lashed these 'critics' of the Irish revolution saying:

'The term "putsch", in its scientific sense, may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses. The centuriesold Irish national movement, having passed through various stages and combinations of class interest... manifested itself in street fighting conducted by a section of the urban petty bourgeoisie and a section of the workers after a long period of mass agitation, demonstrations, suppression of newspapers, etc. Whoever calls such a rebellion a "putsch" is either a hardened reactionary, or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon.

Readers will easily see that the criticism levelled against the Easter Rising is, in essence, no different from the criticism levelled against the Provisional Republican Army today. It is equally true that Lenin's principled defence of the Easter Rising is as relevant today as it was in 1916.

Lenin consistently argued that communists in the oppressor nation must support the genuine popular liberation movements in oppressed nations. By any definition of 'genuine' and 'popular' the Irish Republican Army and Provisional Sinn Fein come under that heading.

The struggle being waged by the Provisional Republican movement is a revolutionary nationalist struggle directed against imperialism. It represents the basic fundamental interests of the Irish working class and therefore has the overwhelming support of the most oppressed section of that class—the nationalist minority in the

Six Counties. It is the most advanced struggle against the British ruling class within these islands. This *fact* alone answers the question of the attitude of revolutionaries in Britain to that struggle—how can we do anything but give full and unconditional solidarity to our comrades in Ireland who are sacrificing everything in the fight against our common enemy—British imperialism. We therefore support that movement as communists because we recognise that that movement is *actually* defending the basic interests of Irish workers and the British working class.

That this is so is no accident. As we have already seen, the nature of imperialist oppression drives the oppressed into revolt, forces them to perfect their organisations and methods of struggle, impels them into revolutionary struggle against imperialism and continually produces amongst the oppressed an abiding hatred of oppression. All of these factors combine to produce in the Provisional Republican movement an extremely sophisticated, both militarily and politically, mass based proletarian anti-imperialist organisation. Can this be said of any other group or party within these islands? This reality underlies the revolutionary nationalism of the Irish national liberation movement and gives that movement its consistently democratic, progressive and internationalist outlook. If the task of socialist revolution in Britain is to overthrow the British ruling class and if that ruling class derives its power from the system of British imperialism then it is necessarily the case that communists in Britain support the struggle against that system and that ruling class. In Ireland that struggle has taken on an unprecedented scope and depth.

The Irish struggle and the socialist revolution

It is possible even today to hear people in this country talk in very high tones about the 'shortcomings' of the Irish liberation movement. They point to its alleged lack of a socialist perspective, they talk loftily about the need for 'mass' politics and they counterpose the socialist revolution to the struggle actually being waged by the Irish people. They proceed from there to issue advice to the oppressed on how to conduct their struggle. For these people the relationship between the Irish people and the socialist movement in Britain is that of the pupil to the teacher. They are convinced that they will school the Irish people in the task of carrying out a socialist revolution. We have already made clear that the reality is that the Irish people are in the vanguard of the struggle against British imperialism. The Provisional Republican movement does more in a single day to further the cause of socialist revolution than its petit bourgeois critics will do in a lifetime. Why? Every day of the Irish war the Irish national

liberation movement exposes the reality of British imperialism. Every day that movement exposes the *possibility* of resisting imperialism and the *necessity* to defeat it if the working class is to achieve power and establish socialism. These practical lessons are of enormous importance to us in Britain. There is only one movement which can draw tens of thousands of working class people behind an anti-imperialist banner—the Provisional Republican movement. There is only one movement which produces a mass circulation weekly revolutionary newspaper for a working class audience—the Provisional Republican movement. That movement has accumulated a wealth of revolutionary experience which will be invaluable to the movement in Britain: how to conduct legal and illegal work, armed struggle and propaganda war, how to conduct revolutionary work in the courts and in the prisons and how to withstand the most intense and systematic repression. The revolutionary movement in Britain will, sooner or later, stand in need of the lessons which the Irish movement can teach us.

In every sense the Irish national liberation struggle contains the key to the socialist revolution both in Ireland and in Britain. Our task as communists is to first of all understand this fact and then to act on it. The key to the socialist revolution in Britain is the building of a working class anti-imperialist movement. Such a movement will be built alongside the revolutionary nationalist movement of the Irish people. Irish people in Britain will play a leading role in that movement uniting with the best elements in the British working class and bringing to British workers their own knowledge and experience of the reality of British imperialism and imbuing the class struggle in Britain with their own hatred of British imperialism and determination to overthrow it. As communists we seek to participate fully in that process, to fight to realise the full potential of that struggle and to unite with the revolutionary nationalist organisations of the Irish people against our common enemy—British imperialism. This is the real connection between the national liberation struggle of the Irish people and the struggle for socialism. They are not divorced one from the other or antagonistic one to the other, but complementary components of one and the same struggle.

Terry Marlowe

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

May I take this opportunity to congratulate *Hands Off Ireland!* and the comrades in the Revolutionary Communist Group responsible for its publication. Behind this magazine, I am sure, stands a group (perhaps the first in Britain) which is genuinely trying to build an anti-imperialist, anti-chauvinist internationalist movement.

Their support for the Irish Revolution and in particular for its armed vanguard the revolutionary IRA is in the best tradition of the Marxist movement and represents a refreshing change from our would-be mentors in the Brit left. RCG's anti-chauvinism is a tribute to revolutionary socialism in Britain and I am convinced that when the day comes that British workers finally break from Imperialism and join their Irish brothers in the struggle for liberation and socialism the RCG will surely be among the leadership of that struggle.

You can be assured, comrades, that when that day comes you will find many friends in Ireland ready to give you the assistance which you have given us in our struggle.

Venceremos

GML
Provisional Sinn Fein, South Wales

Dear Comrade(s)

Although [*Hands Off Ireland!* no8] was the first time I read any RCG literature, bulletin 8 gives me what I consider a fair understanding of your position, and as an Irish youth I laud it. Unlike your 'sister' parties you are unreserved in your support for the Irish peoples revolutionary struggle of national liberation led by the Provisional Republican movement. You do not fall into the trap common to them of giving selective solidarity to the oppressed. The article on state racism confirms that you see the Irish war as part of a world struggle against imperialism. In short you have a firm grasp of reality something they and many of the so-called 'left' wing parties in Ireland do not. May I wish you success in your efforts to build an anti-imperialist movement in the British working class.

Yours, go mifhoighneach
agus le meas

A reader
Wexford
31.8.1979

BUILD HANDS OFF IRELAND

The war in Ireland is at a critical stage—on the one hand the Republican Movement has scored significant victories over British imperialism, on the other hand the prisoners face ever-increasing brutality and ever-deteriorating conditions. Today, the comrades in the H-Blocks are vomiting worms as a result of the barbaric conditions in the concentration camps. Irish men and women are sacrificing their lives in the struggle against British imperialism. What are **you** doing?

Every effort counts. Don't just read **Hands Off Ireland!** Take as many copies as you can. Sell them to your workmates and friends. Tell them what is happening in Ireland and why. Take copies to your trade union meetings or any other meetings you go to. We need **your** help to expand the circulation of **Hands Off Ireland!**

Start raising the issue of Ireland in your trade union or any other organisation you belong to. Help us to build trade union support for the campaign and events such as the forthcoming Provisional Sinn Fein **Bloody Sunday March** in Birmingham and the Provisional Sinn Fein/Hands Off Ireland conference in London. We will supply speakers to any trade union organisation. But **you** have to start the process. This work in the trade unions is urgent. It must start now.

Every town and city in the country should have regular street meetings, pickets, marches, rallies and conferences. But we cannot do this without **your** help. Hands Off Ireland wants to expand its campaign to every part of the country. **You** can make this possible.

To carry out our campaign costs a great deal of money. **You** can help us by making a financial contribution to our work. This will allow us not just to maintain our present level of work but to do a great deal more.

The situation in Ireland is too serious and too urgent for there to be any delay in building a strong anti-imperialist movement. Only **you** can ensure that this goal is achieved. Such a movement, marching alongside the Republican movement, can quickly make a decisive contribution to the Irish people's struggle. **You** have the opportunity to do this work. **The choice is yours.**

Title: Hands Off Ireland!, No. 9

Organisation: Revolutionary Communist Group

Date: 1979

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