

INTRODUCTION

6d.

**THE CRISIS
IN THE
UNIONIST
PARTY**

**Produced by the
Irish Communist Organisation**

INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS OF "NON POLITICS"

There is little doubt that a vast amount of confusion exists in the working class movement in Ireland and Britain about the basis of the political crisis within the Unionist Party, and the relationship of this crisis to the social upheavals of the past few months. It is equally indisputable that, to a large extent, this confusion is the direct result of the political policies of the official civil rights movement and particularly of those supposedly "socialist" organisations who, together with a few small capitalists and professional people, dominate the leadership of it.

Is it not a contradiction in terms to speak of the political policy of the official civil rights movement, a movement which never lets slip any opportunity of describing itself as "non-political"? Not in the least. In capitalist society, composed as it is of two fundamentally opposed classes, all politics reflects and expresses, at root, the class interest of either the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) on the one hand, or the working class on the other. Any movement, such as the civil rights movement, which is attempting to exert pressure socially must, by its very nature, be political. The civil rights movement has declared itself in opposition to one form of Unionist Party politics; and one line of politics can only be opposed by another line of politics. Clearly therefore, in reality, there can be no such thing as a "non-political" social movement. What there can be, however, is a political movement which is doing its best to convince people that it is not political.

And why should this be so? Why, for example, have representatives of the so-called "Communist" Party of Northern Ireland even resigned from the Civil Rights Association in protest over the "intrusion" of other varieties of bourgeois

politics - as represented by the Trotskyist and Anarchist tendencies in the Peoples Democracy- into the official civil rights movement, not to mention working class politics? And why has this absolute determination to maintain the "non-political" label of the civil rights movement by the sham "communists" of the CPNI been vigorously applauded by another so-called revolutionary organisation, Sinn Fein (see United Irishman, March 1969). The ^{reason} is not hard to find.

In capitalist society bourgeois politics serves the interests of capitalism, helping to maintain and extend the economic power of the capitalist class over the working class. On the other hand, working class politics serves to enhance the political development of the working class as a necessary condition for the overthrow of the capitalist class, the abolition of capitalism, and the establishment of socialism. Bourgeois politics and ideology tends to dominate over and influence the thinking of the working class in those periods when capitalism is relatively stable. During any crisis in capitalist society however the working class has a chance to free itself much more easily from bourgeois influences, taking advantage of favourable conditions to develop itself politically in the class struggle.

It is therefore precisely in periods such as these that the maximum effort is required on the part of genuine socialists to develop revolutionary working class politics and ideology. And it is quite clear that there is a major crisis in bourgeois politics in the 6 Cos. today. The official civil rights movement counts among its leading lights representatives of various political organisations who like to imagine that they are socialists. Among these we find the sham "Communists" of the CPNI and the equally bankrupt "socialists" of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Together they have vehemently insisted on every possible occasion that the civil rights movement is "non-political". These sham socialists have been consistently supported in their attitude by several other supposedly socialist organisations, including the London-based Connolly Association, the Irish Workers Party in the 26 Cos., the "Communist" Party of Great Britain, and Sinn Fein (whose politics are daily becoming more difficult to distinguish from those of the rev-

isionist "Communists" themselves.

Now what does it signify when all these organisations who, by their terms of reference, we would expect to be actively working for the maximum extension of working class politics in the present situation in the 6 Cos, are found instead to be fiercely resisting that development? It can only signify that an attempt is being made to help out the crisis-ridden bourgeoisie in a period of crisis; it signifies betrayal of the working class interest.

Under the influence of these sham socialists, the civil rights movement is pledged to trying to bring about an end to sectarianism. But, as we have shown in previous pamphlets, sectarianism of the kind rampant in the 6 Cos. for the past fifty years was nothing but an aspect of the politics of the 6 Cos. ruling capitalist class. Is it conceivable therefore that the influence of sectarianism in the working class movement can be eliminated in any other way than on the basis of a thorough understanding of the class basis of sectarianism? Can it be possibly overcome by merely asserting, as the sham socialists do, that it is desirable? Of course not. It can only be overcome in the course of the development of political consciousness in the working class movement, seeing it for what it was and what role it played in helping to maintain capitalism in the 6 Cos. and the imperialist domination of Ireland by British monopoly capitalism. Such a development quite obviously requires the fullest propagation of the highest form of revolutionary working class politics - Communist politics.

Thus the attempt to exclude thorough political analysis from the official civil rights movement, the attempt to divorce politics from the realities of the changing form of 6 Cos. capitalist society today, is therefore nothing less than an attempt to maintain the influence of bourgeois politics in the working class movement; it is not an attempt to exclude any kind of politics (as the sham socialists claim), but an attempt to exclude working class politics.

It is an old tactic of sham socialists to try to organise

the working class behind the vaguest slogans for some reform of capitalist society at the expense of the political development of the working class itself. Today, in the midst of a deep crisis in bourgeois politics, these sham socialists declare that the fundamental issue is civil rights and that politics must not be allowed to "disrupt the unity of the progressive forces". As traitors to the working class they subordinate the development of the working class to a limited demand for the reform of capitalist society; such an attitude has nothing in common with revolutionary socialism despite the fact that most of them, from Betty Sinclair to Bernadette Devlin like (when they find it convenient) to describe themselves as such.

Thus it is clear that the "non-political" line of the sham socialists in the leadership of the official civil rights movement is, in fact, very much a political line itself. It is a political line which can only serve the interests of a crisis-ridden capitalist class in a situation favourable for the development of a solid working class movement.

The confusion which has been created by the sham socialists must be cut through. The I.C.O. since its formation towards the end of 1965, has provided a clear and consistent analysis of the nature of 6 Cos. politics and the basis of the changes now taking place; that analysis has been shown to be correct by the events of the past three years. A brief summary of the main points of this analysis is given below; a more detailed and comprehensive analysis can be found in the I.C.O pamphlet "The Economics of Partition".

THE TWO FACES OF UNIONISM —

THE BASIS OF SECTARIANISM IN THE NORTH

Some years ago, Lord Brookeborough, then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, remarked in a speech to the Orange Brethren at a July 12th celebration:

"There are a great number of Protestants and Orangemen who employ Roman Catholics. I feel I can speak freely on this subject as I have not a Roman Catholic about my own place. I would appeal to Loyalists, therefore, wherever possible, to employ good Protestant lads and lassies."

How has it come about that Terence O'Neill, until very recently Prime Minister, and a loyal Cabinet member of the Brookeborough government throughout the 1950's, emerged as a leading advocate of non-sectarianism and civil rights within the Unionist Party. What has taken place which forces the British ruling class, which gave its wholehearted support to Unionist fascism for close on fifty years, to threaten that same regime with dire consequences if it refuses to carry out a broad programme of "democratisation"? It is not possible to understand such striking changes in Unionist Party policy and the attitude of British imperialism without a clear understanding of the historical basis of the "old" face of Unionism.

"New" Unionism is attempting to replace "old" Unionism: but, in fact, both represent merely forms of 6 Cos. capitalist rule in two very different situations. The older variety, which is tending to be displaced - and characterised by fascist police methods, extreme religious bigotry, gerrymandering and so on - was the form which 6 Cos. capitalist rule had to

6.

take in the situation it found itself in when the Irish nation was partitioned along capitalist lines nearly fifty years ago.

WHAT IS PARTITION ABOUT ?

Partition itself was the consequence of the uneven development of capitalism in Ireland. In the North-East of Ulster, capitalism had developed to the stage of large-scale industry by the turn of the century. In the remainder of Ireland however, capitalism was weak and steadily declining. Economically, the big capitalists in the North-East were quite satisfied with the union of Ireland and Britain brought about by the Act of Union in 1801; their prosperity had grown up, to a large extent, on the basis of the Union. Their continued prosperity depended upon the markets of the British Empire where the products of the Ulster shipyards and textile factories were sold. Politically, as a consequence of their economic interests, they were Unionist to the core - their profits rested upon that Union. Their attitude towards the "link" with Britain and the Empire is strikingly expressed in the following quotation from a Unionist Party pamphlet called "Commercial Ulster and the Home Rule Movement" published in 1902. Referring to their determination to resist Home Rule, it said:

"The cry against separatism...is not merely the voice of the Episcopalians, or the voice of the Orangemen that is heard..it is not the voice of Protestantism alone...it is the voice of civilised humanity..it is the voice of trade, it is the voice of commerce, it is the voice of capital; it is the voice of the Chamber of Commerce."

(our emphasis)

In the remainder of Ireland, however, with capitalism in decline as a result of competition from British goods - which could be produced more cheaply because of more advanced technology - the smaller capitalists (the petit-bourgeoisie) could see that only on the basis of protectionism could they hope

to survive. But in order to erect the necessary tariff barriers against British goods, political control of Irish territory was necessary. Economically, the interests of the small capitalists required a policy of protection, as opposed to the free trade policy required by the big capitalists in the North. Politically, the economic interests of the small capitalists expressed themselves in the Home Rule movement. In the words of Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Fein (and whose policies were put into practice by De Valera in 1932):

"Protection means rendering the native manufacturer equal to meeting foreign competition. If a manufacturer cannot produce as cheaply as an English or other foreigner, only because his foreign competitor has larger resources at his disposal, then it is the first duty of the Irish nation to accord protection to that Irish manufacturer....."

("Sinn Fein Policy", 1905)

The economic interests of the two sections of the Irish capitalist class were antagonistic to each other; Free Trade policies which were in operation at the time, would inevitably result in the wiping out of the small capitalists who were predominant outside of the North East of Ulster; Protectionism applied throughout Ireland would mean the death of big capitalism in Ulster, which could not have survived on the basis of an Irish market alone. The economic antagonism between the two sections of the Irish capitalist class was reflected in their respective politics. Unionism was the expression of the economic interests of the big capitalists in the North, Home Rule was the expression of the economic interests of the small capitalists in the remainder of the country.

The mass movement organised by the political representatives of the Northern capitalists (i.e. Carsonism) to defend itself against the middle class dominated Nationalist (Home Rule) movement, relied mainly for its ideology on the already existing religious divisions in the nation. Thus the struggle to remain within the British market was fought in the guise

8.

of a struggle to remain Protestant. The Nationalist middle class relied on Catholicism for its official ideology.

When the conflict between the big capitalists in the North and the small capitalists in the rest of the country was temporarily resolved by partition of the nation in 1920-1921, the Northern ruling class got control of a substantial Nationalist population. This large Nationalist minority in the North (now the 6 Cos.), politically dominated by the Nationalist middle class, was regarded by the Unionists as a detachment in their midst of the political forces of the Southern ruling class.

In stable capitalist "democracies", the ruling capitalist class tries to keep real antagonisms well under the political surface of society. It attempts to rule by preventing the oppressed classes from becoming politically conscious of the basis of their antagonisms with the ruling class. It tries to mould public opinion through massive propaganda and deception - though it always has powerful force, the police and armed forces, at the ready for use when other methods prove inadequate.

But in the North of Ireland, the antagonism between Nationalism and Unionism has always existed in a naked form - the more subtle methods of political rule established in Britain (i.e. British "Democracy") were quite useless in the 6 Cos. Here, the Unionist two thirds of the population was actively organised to suppress the Nationalist minority. Direct physical suppression, religious massacres, the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries to prevent the Nationalists from gaining Parliamentary influence - which could threaten the whole Unionist position - a sustained atmosphere of bigoted sectarianism; these became the normal methods of 6 Cos. capitalist rule.

As long as the Southern capitalists presented any kind of revolutionary threat to the very economic basis of Unionism - dependence on the British market - there could not possibly be any end to this kind of sectarianism in the relations between Unionists and Nationalists within the framework of capitalism. There could be only two alternative developments which could provide the basis for bringing such vicious sectarianism to an end; either capitalism would be overthrown by the combined strength of the Irish working class - thus putting an

end to the class basis of sectarianism, or the Southern ruling class could come back into the imperialist fold with their class brothers in the North: the second alternative has now come into being.

Only on the basis of a revolutionary working class movement, which challenged the existence of both the Free State and Stormont regimes as twin creations of British imperialism in Ireland, could any breakthrough against sectarianism be made. But since a genuine Communist movement - which is the only form of revolutionary working class politics - existed only for a short period in the 1930's, the basis of religious sectarianism remained intact until the 1950's. And when it began to disappear, it was not through the development of working class politics, but through an economic development in capitalist Ireland.

BOURGEOIS HANDS ACROSS THE BORDER

The Southern ruling class outgrew the protectionist phase of its development. In 1959 it began to dismantle the tariff barriers; in 1965 it signed the Free Trade Agreement with British imperialism. Lemass came to Stormont; O'Neill went to Leinster House, and the Nationalist Party became Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition (a position they have since dropped for tactical reasons). When the interests of the two sections of the Irish capitalist class fell into line with respect to British imperialism and the British market, the methods of Unionist rule which had been applied for half a century ceased - from their point of view - to be the most effective method of rule. Thus, this underlying economic development lies at the basis of the necessity for the two sections of the capitalist class to establish a new relationship in accord with the changed economic realities. All this was summed up very clearly by one of the most class-conscious bourgeois newspapers in Britain, the Daily Telegraph. Commenting on the first cross-border talks in January, 1965, it said:

"A new Ireland has come to birth....Nowadays, even to Irishmen of late middle age, the old quarrels are becoming a matter of academic history. Underlying all else is the realisation that the Republic, the Six Counties, and Great Britain are, for good or ill, one economic unit, bound to co-operate or be impoverished all round."

It is plain, therefore, that the basis for change in Unionist Party politics (and Nationalist politics too) lies in these developments; the solid business community, who, for solid business reasons, supported the fascist and sectarian policies of the Unionist Party in the past, have now become "democrats" in the furtherance of the same solid business interests in a changed situation.

THE POLITICS OF PAISLEY AND

THE POLITICS OF O'NEILL

The crisis in the Unionist Party has arisen because certain parts of the fascist machine, erected carefully over a period of fifty years, are attempting to resist "democratisation". The demagoguery of five decades is not easily neutralised, old habits die hard. But however loudly the Paisleyites may shout, however much short term support they can command, it is quite clear that they do not have the support where it counts - they do not have the support of British imperialism. Unlike the forerunners of Paisley fifty years ago, the Carsonites, clearly bigotry and anti-Catholicism of Paisley's brand is only standing in the way of economic developments being actively supported by British imperialism today.

In the recent Stormont election only the O'Neill Unionists possessed a clear political objective which expressed the interests of monopoly capitalism. The task of O'Neill Unionism was to bring into being in the 6 Cos. a typical bourgeois democratic system now that conditions had developed in which it was both

desirable and possible. The logic of anti-O'Neill Unionism of the type which Craig seems to be supporting must lead to the defiance of the British Government - the political caretaker of British imperialism - and to a movement for 6 Cos. "independence" along Rhodesian lines. "Whatever the possibilities of such a policy might have been in past decades - and they would always have been slight - it is a fact that there is hardly any important area of the 6 Cos. economy which is not directly under the control of British monopoly capitalism today. The objective basis for such a movement is therefore so slight, the lunacy of it so obvious, that the anti-O'Neill Unionists dare not advocate the logical political conclusion of their position; all they can do is to take up an emotional stance in favour of the traditional sectarian politics of the Unionist Party.

The attempt by O'Neill to change the structure of the Unionist Party by declaring a snap election in the midst of a political crisis was a failure. While he gained marginal successes he failed to bring about the necessary reorganisation in the politics of the Unionist Party. He resigned and has been replaced by Chichester-Clarke. But ~~there~~ is no question that during his term of office O'Neill's policies thoroughly shook up the Unionist Party and prepared it to face the new political realities. During those six years he consistently outmanoeuvred the opposition; in the process he attracted to himself the hatred of the Unionist diehards who could act only in accordance with their past conditioning, and not in accord with the political requirements of the present. Nevertheless the personal victory which the diehards achieved over O'Neill cannot be interpreted as a victory of his logical imperialist policies. *OVER*

It is not our task to attempt to penetrate the inner sanctums of grass-roots Unionist Party politics. In fifty years of monolithic rule a highly complex system of inner-party corruption has undoubtedly been erected. Certainly much local vested interest has been built up. But, above all, one thing is clear; the most class conscious and far-sighted bourgeois politicians in the Unionist Party understand perfectly well

that the days of sectarianism and old style Unionist Party politics are numbered. The new situation requires politics approaching those in the rest of the British imperialist state. If the attempt by the more class conscious elements within the Unionist Party to bring its politics into line with the requirements of imperialism is not successful and it falls headlong into a period of intensifying fragmentation, that will be all to the good; it will represent a severe loss to British imperialism.

"THE REVOLUTIONARIES"

The various political forces opposing the Unionist Party (but not necessarily opposing Unionism) have given a remarkable demonstration of their own inadequacy over the past year. The politics of Republicanism, Nationalism, Liberalism, and Revisionism have all demonstrated their incapacity for dealing with the situation which has arisen since the late 1950's. The only development of relevance has come from outside these bodies. Both Hume and Cooper are the direct representatives of the Catholic-Protestant business community in Derry, and Bernadette Devlin emerged directly out of the student radical movement. When individuals like Betty Sinclair sulks because the "political cuckoos" of the Peoples Democracy are stealing the thunder, it is merely a further expression of the impotence and irrelevance of the organisation she represents.

The "revolutionaries" in the Republican and Revisionist organisations have had a quarter of a century and more to develop their politics and be prepared to give clear and effective leadership to the masses when the old political structures began to crumble. Instead of doing that they disarmed the people politically. The absurd and reactionary lengths to which they have gone is shown by the nature of the recent events: for over 20 years the sham-socialist CPNI has been peddling the illusion that a peaceful road to socialism was a real possibility in a fascist police state where not even the transition to bourgeois democracy within the Union could be achieved peacefully!

These bankrupt organisations must inevitably be the losers in any further political development; events have shown that they loose from the development of effective bourgeois radical politics (such as those of the Peoples Democracy), not to mention a development of real socialist politics.

A REVOLUTIONARY WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

The agreement by these various "revolutionaries" to operate in a social movement under a non-political label means, in practice, an agreement to operate within the terms laid down by British imperialism. It is only the class interest of the ruling class which requires the rigid exclusion of working class politics in the present situation. Communists must oppose this policy absolutely. Even though working class dominance may not emerge from the present crisis, the situation is favourable for the emergence of a substantial Communist movement from it.

The development of a Communist movement is necessary for the furtherance of working class interest in capitalist Ireland. It must be a unified Communist movement, subordinating itself to neither section of the capitalist class in the nation. The bourgeois partition of the nation must not be allowed to reflect itself in a partition of the working class movement, as it has done in the sham socialist organisations.

* * * *

Irish Communist Organisation, May 1969.

CONNOLLY BOOKS PUBLICATIONS

CONNOLLY'S SUPPRESSED WRITINGS:

- Volume 1: Press Poisoners in Ireland1/6
Volume 2: Yellow Unions in Ireland.....1/6
Volume 3: Connolly-Walker Controversy.....2/6
Volume 4: Ireland and the Insurance Act...(out shortly)

Also: The Present Position of the Irish Question (1894)
by John Leslie.....1/-

J U S T P U B L I S H E D

NEIL GOOLD: THE TWENTIETH CONGRESS AND AFTER.....1/6
- The first Marxist assessment of the Twentieth Congress
and its significance for the international communist
movement. Includes an analysis of Trotskyism; also
of the 1956 invasion of Hungary.

I. C. O. P U B L I C A T I O N S

- The Irish Republican Congress (history of the 26 Cos.,
1931-36)....2/-
The Working Class in the Irish National Revolution
1916-23.....2/-
The Connolly Association (a historical review of its
degeneration)....2/-
The Marxism of James Connolly.....2/6
The Economics of Partition.....2/6
Marxachas Lenineachas le Padraic O Conaire1/6

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Irish Communist, 9/- for 6 months; other magazines also available on request.

ALL LITERATURE AVAILABLE BY POST FROM:

E. Spence,
25 Dickson St.,
Belfast (west).

D Golden,
28 Mercers Rd.,
London N. 19.

Connolly Books,
62 College Rd.,
Cork.

(add 4d for postage per item)

Title: The Crisis in The Unionist Party
Organisation: Irish Communist Organisation
Date: 1969

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.
Visit www.leftarchive.ie

The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.