

Northern Ireland

# For Workers' Unity

A reply to the Workers' Association Pamphlet  
"What's wrong with Ulster Trade Unionism?"

by Peter Hunt

A 'MILITANT' PAMPHLET

20p

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# INTRODUCTION

Since the Ulster Workers Council (UWC) strike a variety of groups have raised the demand for the establishment of an Ulster Trade Union Congress, separate from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the British Trade Union Congress (TUC). This pamphlet is a reply to one such group, the Workers Association (WA), who, in a pamphlet, "Whats wrong with Ulster trade unionism?" issue this demand.

The Ulster TUC proposal is nothing new. It has its roots in the refusal of the Stormont Government until 1964 to recognise the Northern Committee (NIC) of the ICTU. During and after their recent strike several UWC spokesmen made it a plank of their policy. To their out and out shame a section of the leadership of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) have given it what they term a 'guarded' welcome. It remains one of the most divisive and reactionary ideas circulation within the working class.

The publication of the Workers Association pamphlet was greeted with a welter of publicity. Press coverage gave the impression that it was a pamphlet mainly concerned with arguing the case for an Ulster TUC. In truth only a tiny proportion of this document deals with this question; the remainder is devoted to other but related issues. A considerable portion of this work is therefore taken up with answering the other points raised by the WA, particularly their characterisation of the present trade union leadership as 'republican' and their version of Irish Labour History.

The Workers Association have an identical position to that of another group - the British and Irish Communist Organisation. No differences appear between the material of these groups. Therefore this pamphlet treats them as identical. One section deals with the broader ideas of these tendencies and the implications of these ideas, and appended is an article written by Peter Taaffe, the editor of the British MILITANT, and reprinted from the first issue of the MILITANT IRISH MONTHLY, which deals with the B&ICO theory that Ireland is two nations.

Finally and most importantly this work is not intended merely as an answer to the B&ICO and WA. Sectarianism in NI has had a shattering effect on the Labour Movement. The Ulster TUC proposal can only serve to worsen this effect. However just to discard this idea is not enough. It is necessary to work out the ways and means by which flesh can be once again put on the Northern Irish Trade Union Movement. In rejecting as totally false the theories and proposals of the WA, this pamphlet seeks also to provide a positive alternative - a set of class ideas and demands around which the might of Organised Labour could be brought to the fore.

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# THE ROLE OF THE UNION LEADERSHIP

The Northern Committee of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions are 'Republicans'. Those who sit on Belfast Trades Council are no different. So say the Workers Association in their 'Whats wrong with Ulster trade unionism?' pamphlet. 80% of this work is an attempt to justify this accusation. Only for a page or two at the end is the more publicised idea of an Ulster TUC given any attention. The aim of the pamphlet is not to improve the structure of the trade unions in NI, as has been suggested by some, but is to smear the leadership of the Trade Union Movement as 'republican' and thereby help discredit them.

Many of the pamphlet's arguments are hair raising indeed! The leaders of the NIC are tried and convicted of the above 'offence' on 'grounds' which only serve to expose the lack of any class understanding on the part of the Workers Association. The NIC committed such 'republican' crimes as refusing to participate in the jubilee celebrations to mark the fifty years of the Northern Ireland state. After fifty years of unemployment and low wages for many of their members what were the trade unions supposed to celebrate? But this action was a symptom of a much more heinous crime! The NIC actually backed the demand for civil rights in NI!

## CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil Rights, according to the W.A. was "promoted by the republican movement with the objective of weakening internal and international support for the N.I. Administration prior to its overthrow". (P.4), Why socialists should support and defend the rotten tory state and administration in N.I. we are not told!

From the erudite thinkers who penned this pamphlet we learn a little new about N.I. history. More accurately we find re-invoked the lies and myths about the nature of the N.I. state which for too long the unionist hierarchy were able to spread. The Civil Rights movement slashed through the web of unionist mythology with facts. Now we find the spider of the B&ICO and the WA busily at work with its theoretical needle attempting to repair the damage.

From civil rights platforms unanswerable arguments about discrimination in the fields of housing, job allocation and local election franchise were spelt out. In Derry with its 36,000 catholics and 18,000 protestants the unionist gerrymander was so effective that 12 out of the 20 seats on the council were consistently held by the Unionists. Into one of the city's three wards 10,000 of the 14,000 catholics eligible to vote in the city were crammed. Many other parts of the north, Fermanagh in particular, tell the same story. The WA cannot remain silent:

"...in a few cases where there was a balance between unionists and nationalists in local government, the unionists submitted plans which favoured them-- and in the absence of nationalist plans, these won out. On the local government franchise: this affected the working class, both catholic and protestant equally

and was the same as existed in England up to 1940.

As a mighty gesture of condescension it is admitted that some slight discrimination did exist. But this affected all workers equally! In this section of the pamphlet we learn what Paisley, William Craig, Craigavon, Brookeborough and the rest have so often told us. Any evils in the NI state were the fault of the minority! They abstained from the state. Had they submitted plans!! as suggested above all would have been rosy! Nothing is said of the policy of terror levelled through the B Specials against catholic areas during the first years of the N.I. state. Nothing of James Craig's proud boast that he had helped found a "Protestant Government for a protestant people".

Job allocation which favoured protestants was not a result of discrimination. Rather it was because protestants had the necessary skills for work in industry while catholics in Belfast in 1920 were "first generation immigrants who possess no skills and no aptitude for industrial work and factory discipline" (P.15). So the sectarian jibe about the lazy, undisciplined catholic is confirmed by this scientific analysis! Protestants, the WA inform us (P.15) were given more jobs, "not by conscious discrimination, but by the normal functioning of trades unionism. Indeed! It would be interesting to know what these writers would have to say to the speech of Sir Basil Brooke who in 1933 remarked: Many in the audience employ catholics but I have not one about my place".

In July 1920 Sir Edward Carson addressed the protestants in the Belfast shipyards and called for action. He was rewarded by a riot in which most of the catholic workers were driven from the yard. Afterwards Sir James Craig, again addressing the shipyard men, said: "If you ask me my opinion of your action, I say, 'Well done'. On October 25th of that year Carson returned to this subject and declared that he was "prouder of my friends in the shipyards than of any other friends I have in the world". Ah but, say the B&ICO and the WA, if only the minority had submitted plans....!

The disease from which these two tendencies suffer has a variety of symptoms. On the one hand it affects the memory. Just a few years ago these same birds sang a different tune. June 1970, in issue No 54 of the Irish Communist (B&ICO publication) the editorial described the civil rights movement as "a movement for the democratic reform of the sectarian semi-fascist political structure built up by the Unionist bourgeoisie over a period of fifty years".

Another symptom of their sickness is that whenever they discover something wrong with their attempts to correct it only compound the original mistake a thousand times. They are like a surgeon who discovers a tumor on the brain and operates to remove the brain and leave the tumor. That the campaign for civil rights degenerated and in the end attracted only sectarian support is beyond question. But from this fact the WA write off the entire campaign as 'republican inspired' and invent the most outrageous arguments to justify the undemocratic practices built up by the unionist bosses. Because the NIC backed the NICRA campaign and pushed "the civil rights demands to the furthest extent" (P.5) they, conclude the WA, are "republicans" and must be removed from their positions.

#### CIVIL RIGHTS -- A CLASS QUESTION.

In Northern Ireland discrimination was a means used by the employing class to cement the division of the working class along religious lines. Workers who are divided are less able to fight for decent wages etc. In the July 1920 riots in the shipyard it was significant that those who provoked the fighting, notably Carson and the Belfast Protestant Association, urged that not only catholics but also socialists should be driven from their work benches.



The trade union leadership are at fault in relation to this issue. Not at fault for raising it, but at fault for taking a back seat and allowing green Tories such as Hume and Cooper to head the civil rights struggle. Initially many protestants were either sympathetic or neutral to the ending of discrimination. But as the campaign developed it was met by a thunder of bigotry from those high up in the unionist movement. Most unionist politicians wasted no time in decrying the civil rights campaign as an attempt to undermine the status of protestants. (Not much different from the WA propaganda) Marches were driven into catholic areas so that people would know what colour these demonstrators were. The Humes and Coopers had no answers which could allay the growing fears of protestant workers that this really was a movement directed against them.

In an arena of unemployment, low wages and squalid housing such as is N.I. protestant workers were determined to hold onto what little they had. Civil Rights as presented through the mouths of Hume and Cooper meant only the most equal distribution of what there was. In N.I. it meant and still means the equal allocation of unemployment, the equal sharing out of the slums - in short the equal distribution of poverty. The fear of the protestant worker was that, for example in relation to employment, it would mean redundancy for him so that a catholic could take the job.

The Labour and Trade Union Movement could have laid these fears to rest. They could have brought catholic and protestant workers together around this issue, but only if class demands had been raised. Instead of the dividing up of poverty they could have led a struggle for houses for all, for jobs for all and for a living wage for all workers. A myth has been built up that the protestant working class is 'priveleged' and would not have responded to such a campaign. On the contrary! Discrimination lined the pockets not of the workers but of the landowning and capitalist classes who made up the unionist hierarchy. Among the working class it merely meant that while protestants were given nothing the catholics had to make do with even less. No statement better sums up the attitude of protestant workers than that made by Gusty Spence during his period of freedom recently:

"We have known squalor. I was born and reared in it. No-one knows better than we do the meaning of slums, the meaning of deprivation, the meaning of suffering for what one believes in, whatever the ideology. In so far as people speak of fifty years of misrule, I wouldn't disagree with that. What I would say is this, that we have suffered every bit as much as the people of the Falls Road."

Protestant workers would have joined a struggle against the overlords of the unionist order if they had seen in that struggle a solution to their day to day problems as well as those of their neighbours. To-day the civil rights movement continues with the same demands as in the tumultuous days of 1968-69 when it became a mass force. Its leaders are the Communist Party and the Official Republican Movement. In refusing to broaden their demands from those of mere democracy they have learnt nothing from the past.

The B&ICO and WA are blind to the plight of the catholic working class. Equally they are in the dark when it comes to the problems of protestant workers. Their conclusion about the civil rights movement? It was a 'republican plot', the civil rights programme was "a nationalist scheme"(PI3) The only answer to all this that they can come up with is that the trade union leadership must be axed!

#### A SMEAR CAMPAIGN

"Trade union officials using their positions to put forward nationalist views, such as Andrew Barr should be ousted, using trade union methods" (P.3)

WA pamphlet. It is the key issue in the minds of these 'marxists'. But such a call cannot be considered in the abstract. It must be related to the realities of the situation in the unions. The concrete circumstances in which it is raised is in the middle of a campaign on the part of the Ulster Workers Council (UWC) to take over the leadership of the trade union movement. The UWC campaign of to-day is a revamped version of the wrecking campaign not so long ago of the Loyalist Association of workers. That campaign and that organisation foundered when the ineptitude of its leaders on the basic trade union issues of pay and conditions was discovered. To-day in the factories the same people who launched the LAW are at work in the activities of the UWC.

It is sheer lightmindedness to pose the removal of the present trade union leadership in the manner of the B&ICO and WA. The concrete question is that if Barr and company are forced out of their positions by a movement whipped up in the hysteria of 'anti-republicanism', who will replace them? The answer is given indirectly by the WA pamphlet. Every page of this document carries on its war against 'nationalism'. But of even a shadow of a hint of a criticism of any, even the most right wing loyalist groupings, there is nothing. Who succeeds if the WA get their way? Answer: the right wing 'loyalist' groups. Who Looses? Answer: the whole layer of industrial militants who through their skills on trade union issues have won their present positions in the movement.

Socialists are fully justified in fighting for the leadership of the organisations of the working class. Such a struggle must take place around the need for socialist policies. It is a struggle from the left. The B&ICO and WA launch their attack from the right. Their arguments are merely a trap-door which opens the way to trade union positions for right wing candidates. Their pamphlet attacks by name only the leading figures in the unions. But were a campaign around their demands to really gather force, all shop stewards, trade union activists and class conscious militants would be under attack.

The method of argument of the WA is beneath contempt. Marxists always base their arguments on facts. This pamphlet seeks to discredit its opponents by the vile language of smear and insinuation. Its whole basis is a smear campaign painting all opponents as 'republicans'. Precisely the method of argument of generations of unionist and tory 'gentlemen' who have deployed the 'republican Scare' and the 'red scare' at will.

The word 'republican' as with the word 'nationalist' is emotionally charged in the circumstances of Northern Ireland. It cannot be bandied about in the manner of this pamphlet. It must be explained. Nowhere does any explanation of these terms appear in this entire document. Its authors take for granted that all their readers will understand their definitions without explanation. However we do not to have explained to us the reason for the abundant and glib use of these terms. Basing their arguments on the fear among protestant workers of a united Ireland, the WA seek to gain support by hysterically denouncing all and sundry as 'republicans'.

Workers in Northern Ireland have nothing to gain from joining with the South under the present economic system. That is one side of the question. It is the only side the B&ICO and WA care to see. Equally true, however, socialists north and south have nothing to gain by remaining aloof from each other. The fight for socialism must bring workers in both parts of the island together in struggle. Such a struggle would tear aside the border and create a fraternity of workers, catholic and protestant, north and south, a Socialist United Ireland.

But only one class can unite the country because only one class can answer the needs of and unite the people - the working class. The movement of the Irish workers must also link with the

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fight of the working class in the rest of the British Isles as a part of the struggle for a Socialist Federation of these Islands. What socialist could stand opposed to such a class opposition to the border? What 'socialist' other than those in the B&ICO?

The WA are not interested in such arguments about the border. To them the trade union leadership has started the civil rights demands and are therefore 'republicans' and that is that. These people have paid lipservice to marxism. They have not one thing in common with Marx, Engels or Lenin. These three destroyed their political opponents it is true. They destroyed them in open debate using the weapon of honest political argument. Smear and distortion were never part of their vocabulary. But the irresponsibility of the WA goes even beyond the bounds of smear. The result of their arguments is to make targets out of trade union officials and militants. Some of the people who they cheerfully brand as 'republican' live in protestant estates. It is their lives this group are prepared to lay on the line. It is criminal irresponsibility.

#### UNION DEMOCRACY

"It is important that trade unions take steps to exert control over their representatives on public bodies". (P.6)

"...trade union branches affiliate to the Belfast Trades Council, and instruct their delegates NOT to vote for Betty Sinclair, Joe Cooper, Sam Armstrong or any candidates that are nationalists first and trade unionists second". (P.3)

Spokesmen of the WA and the B&ICO have attempted to appear as the champions of union democracy, as the guardians of the rights of the rank and file. The above two demands or proposals is that they could be called are about the most concrete steps proposed for action within the unions.

Unions should affiliate to the Trades Council. With this we concur. But on what basis should this affiliation go through? Simply to oust the present leaders? Then the struggle apparently will end? At least we must assume that it will end at this point for there is no mention of any other reasons why unions should affiliate to the Trades Council! Of the multitude of decisions that an effective Trades Council must make in relation to the day to day problems of its members - not one word.

Trade Unions must "exert control" over public representatives. How? To what ends? Again we are not told. Socialists have long campaigned for democracy within the trade unions. The MILITANT has consistently raised the demand for the election of all officials subject to recall by the membership. Also we have demanded that no trade union official be paid more than the average wage of a skilled worker in his industry. In this way negotiators and organisers would be forced to do effective work. Their salaries as well as those of their members would be at stake. Such demands do not trouble the minds of the WA and B&ICO. Instead they content themselves with issuing the instruction to workers to "exert control" over his organisations. When these workers ask how this is to be done and around what programme they will be met with silence and be forced to conclude that it is wrong to trouble such great minds with such practical trifles! The WA pamphlet says nothing about how to struggle for union democracy. It says a great deal about the need to oust the 'republicans'. We conclude - this pamphlet is not concerned with union democracy. Its only aim is to ensure unionist control of the trade unions.



# WHY LABOUR

## HAS FAILED

Unionist unions and a unionist Labour Party - this is what the WA pamphlet is all about. From its pages we learn: "In fact there is no contradiction between Unionism and socialism" (P3) The trade unions and the Labour Party have been enormously setback during the recent troubles. The quack therapists of the B&ICO and WA have come up with an instant cure for all its ills - become unionist.

As always these theoreticians from their examination of the facts draw totally false conclusions. Why has Labour and trade unionism failed to prevent the slide to sectarianism. The WA have discovered the formula! "It is because the Northern Ireland Labour Party has so often had an ambiguous position on the constitutional question that it failed to obtain the wholehearted support of the Unionist working class(!) who have preferred to vote for unequivocal unionists". (P.10) Needless to say the question why Labour failed to retain the support of the catholic working class does not arise in the material of these people. Once again we see that such great thinkers could not possibly have time for such trifling matters!

To reinforce their arguments they quote the success of both Labour and the Communist Party in the 1945 election. That support say the WA was because both parties stood on a 'unionist' platform. In so far as they dropped their 'unionism' they lost the support of protestant workers. The significance of such an argument is obvious. It means that the way to workers is not on the basis of socialist ideas but by singing the praises of the border and the constitutional arrangement. It means that the present pro-loyalist leaders of the NILP are correct.

Page eight of the pamphlet informs us: "The protestants have never been nationalists....Rather they have preferred to forget about nationalism and get on with the more important issues. Always their only contact with nationalism has been to resist its claim on them". The B&ICO and the WA are the people who claim that Ireland is not one but two nations. If the north is a separate nation, which it is not, (see appendix) then the ideological expression of northern nationalism is unionism. So on the one hand this pamphlet informs us that protestants do not concern themselves with nationalism, ie unionism, but concentrate on the more important issues - to a socialist these are the economic issues. On the other hand this same pamphlet tells us again and again that only when they are unionist can the working class organisations make any headway among protestant workers!

The argument that Labour's failing is for the above reasons deserves an answer if only because it is the same argument as is used time after time by the leaders of the NILP and some of the NIC members. Time after time workers in Northern Ireland have come together in industrial and political struggle. These were the times of upsurge of working class militancy and solidarity - not of nationalism. In 1920 following the titanic industrial struggle of Belfast's engineering workers the previous year, Belfast Labour, together with a small Independent Labour Party contested the local election and won 13 seats. The

unionist bosses attempted to undercut this growing class movement by every means at their disposal. This was the time when the gentry incited their working class followers to riot firstly against the catholics but also against the socialists who were also 'disloyal'. Labour meetings in Belfast were broken up. More significantly for our argument was the fact that the heads of the unionist party produced their own tame version of Labour - candidates were put up on a "Unionist Labour" ticket. These should have been unequivocal enough for the B&ICO and WA! If we accept their conclusions this bosses Labour Party ticket should have been enough to shatter the young and weak Labour Party. In fact this group managed to return only 6 candidates. Notably among the Labour members returned were several members of the 1919 strike committee.

Again and again a groundswell of class militancy has risen through the division in Northern Ireland. In 1945 it was not Labour's 'unionism' which made it more acceptable. It was the tide of class struggle which swept the country after the war. In the forefront of this new militancy were the soldiers who, returning from years of bloodshed and sacrifice, were determined that they had not fought for nothing, that it would not be a return to the mass unemployment and poverty of the 1930s. The Labour vote in NI exactly paralleled the sweeping victory of Labour candidates in Britain, after an election in which the party stood on its most radical programme ever.

In each case as with many other such instances the class momentum was not maintained. The Labour Movement suffered a decline. "Told you so", say the WA, "they weren't unionist enough, therefore they lost support after a time". Precisely the opposite is the case!

The 1939 Conference of the NILP confirmed that Labour believed that NI must stay with the British Commonwealth. The elections of the following year brought to the fore the border issue. Labour candidates were clearly pro-border. All were defeated while the real Unionsits in the Unionist Party swept the boards.

#### 'THE 1949 SPLIT'

In February 1949 the Unionist Government called a Stormont election which they determined to make into a border referendum. Once again the Labour candidates, despite their pro-UK ticket, were decimated, not one managing to hold or win a seat.

The NILP leadership of that day drew precisely the same conclusions from these results as the present leadership and the WA draw from Labour's present sorry position. They decided they had not been 'equivocal enough' in their praises of the British connection. In February 1949 a Conference of the NILP was called and a resolution passed reaffirming that Labour stood to "maintain unbroken the connection between Great Britain and Northern Ireland"

What was the consequence? In May 1949 local elections were held, Standing on their new 'unionist' policy Labour candidates were annihilated, their representation on the Council shrank overnight from eight seats to one. The attempt to make Labour scream louder in praise of the border had two effects: It reinforced the illusions of protestant workers in the Unionist Party, whose council representation rose in 1949 at the expense of the NILP. On the other hand it flung a sectarian division into the ranks of the organised Labour Movement. The NILP split after the 1949 conference. A new group calling itself the Eire Labour Party and attached to the Labour Party in the South was formed and also contested the local elections that May. It returned seven councillors, four for the Falls and three for Smithfield, both catholic constituencies The policy proposed today by the WA for both the NILP and the ICTU would have the same effect.

To-day the NILP stands weak and isolated. Yet throughout recent years its position has been all out support for the link with Britain. The June 1973 election manifesto, on its first page, under a heading THE CONSTITUTION, said: "We support fully the constitutional link with Britain and we supported the affirmative vote for that link in the recent referendum". At the NILP's last annual conference a resolution stressing the party's independence of Labour groups in other countries and calling for a "socialist NI within the UK" was passed supported by the leadership. On this type of position they fought the General Election in February. One of their candidates even changed the party tag on his election posters from Northern Ireland Labour to "Ulster Labour". And for all these cringing efforts to win a protestant vote they were rewarded with an electoral kick in the teeth. All their candidates, including the above 'Ulster Labour' man, lost their deposits with only one exception.

One simple lesson, too simple for the minds of the B&ICO and WA to grasp, flows from all this. It is not possible to out unionist the unionists. They invented the game and they know the rules. If 'more doses of unionism' were the correct remedy for Labour there could be no explanation for its present weakness.

#### THE WALKER TRADITION.

The 1938 position, the 1949 resolution, the present cringing 'loyalism' - these are nothing unusual for Northern Ireland Labour. The Labour Movement developed in the north amid the controversy between the class ideas of James Connolly and the "socialist" unionism of William Walker. Connolly, to the WA, was "bitten very badly by the nationalist bug", while "much more representative of the great mass of trades unionists in NI is William Walker".

They do not tell us what became of this 'great pioneer', Walker. In 1912 he deserted the labour movement and accepted a government position under Lloyd George. Much, much more to the fore in NILP history have been the ideas and the traditions of Walker than those of Connolly. A leading figure throughout the early period of the NILP's history was Harry Midgeley. He generally represented the party in the Dock constituency and became chairman. He typifies the type of leadership the NILP have been given. Was he a 'republican'? No! During the war Midgeley's patriotic feelings overcame him and he left the party to form a Commonwealth Labour Party. Later he entered the Unionist government. In 1958 he gave all pretense of socialism up and became a member of the Unionist Party.

In 1971 this tradition was upheld by the foremost NILP figure of the time - David Bleakley. He accepted a position as a Minister of Brian Faulkner and sat in the cabinet which introduced internment. Walker's ghost still haunts the NILP. Not as a flimsy spectre - but in the bodily form of the party's present leadership and also in the form of the B&ICO and WA.

Labour's stance on such issues as the border has been a brake on its development. Not for the reasons suggested by the WA. Only because it has always preferred the soft option of a Walker type position to the taking of a class stand on the question. The only way a socialist can raise the question of the border is by asking, What constitutional arrangement most meets the needs of the working class? In this light the alternative of a Socialist Ireland and a Socialist Federation of the British Isles is the answer Labour should give. When Labour bends the knee to the sanctity of the border only the unionists and the nationalists gain. Labour's duty is to raise and fight for the common interests of all workers and undermine both unionism and nationalism by uniting the working class around its socialist banner.

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Neither the NILP nor the Northern Committee of the ICTU have failed because they have been 'republicans'. Their failure has really been their willingness to accommodate themselves to the Tory Administration. The accusation that the trade union leadership are secretly plotting to force a merger with the south is laughable. Norman Kennedy, Charley Hull and most of the NIC are not known for their opposition to the NI state. In relation to the NILP the notion that it is not deeply enough soaked in 'unionism' is absurd. Erskine Holmes, Billy Boyd and their friends on the NILP executive have very little they can learn from the WA about unionism.

In relation to civil rights the memory of the B&ICO and WA proved to be defective. So on this question. Their latest material demands that the Labour party sing chorus's in adulation of the border and the British connection. A few years ago they were also critical of the position of the Labour Party and of the Communist Party. The division of the Communist Party of Ireland into two parts they termed: "a complete capitulation by Sinclair, Nolan and Co., to the bourgeois division within the nation"! (Irish Communist August 1969) This from the organisation which to-day states that the country is not one but two nations! In a similar vein they criticised the NILP because it is "organised on a 6 cos basis and is openly pro-imperialist like the British Labour Party." (The Situation in the North. B&ICO leaflet 1969). What they now demand the NILP should be they then criticised it for being!

# AN ULSTER

## T.U.C.?

The NILP leadership has done its best to present itself as the totally independent voice of 'Ulster Labour'. What they have done in a political sense the WA now suggest the trade union movement should do in an industrial sense.

"Whats wrong with Ulster trade unionism?" suggests an Ulster TUC. The pamphlet is divided into six sections. The first five are devoted to 'proofs' of the 'republican' accusation aimed at the NIC and the Trades Council. Only in the last section do they bother to put forward any reasons, other than that the political complexion of the ICTU is wrong, for the carving up of the trade unions.

Here their arguments are weak indeed! The only reasons they can find are: that the bulk of trade unionists in the north are in British based unions (84%) The corresponding figure for the south is only 14%. The NIC is ineffective, they say, in dealing with Northern Ireland affairs. Most employers in the north are British so, runs the argument, Northern Irish workers are fighting the same employers as workers across the water. Therefore links with the British TUC are more important than with the ICTU. However they do not suggest that northern trade unionists switch their allegiance to the TUC in Britain, but that they remain separate from both bodies, while maintaining certain, unspecified links through affiliation.

It is true, no trade unionist denies it, that there are certain matters involving the Trade Union Movement in Northern Ireland which are peculiar to the movement and are best handled by it in a semi-autonomous fashion. The fight against sectarianism is an example. It requires a northern body which can co-ordinate actions and give a lead. On the other hand it is assisted by the links of the northern unions with the power of the organised working class in the south and in Britain. If there were no Northern Committee of the Irish Trade Union Congress, there would be a strong case for establishing one. But this is not the case. The NIC does exist. The task is to convert it into an effective weapon in the hands of the working class. This will not be done by splitting the ICTU in half - nor does the WA pamphlet give any reason why this should be the case.

The Northern Ireland Labour Party for fifty years has been the totally separate voice of Labour in the north. It did not merge itself with the Irish Labour Party. Has its effectiveness been increased by its independence? It has not.

Likewise the fact that the majority of northern unions are British based has no relevance to the argument. There are other unions whose field of operation is exclusive to the north and others still who only have members in the south. This does not mean that they cannot come together within the ICTU. Nor does the fact that northern unions are part of an Irish Congress in any way restrict them in the struggle to uphold the interests of their members in the north. All these points as they are raised by the WA are irrelevances because they do not explain one way in which the NIC is prevented from engaging in struggle in the interest

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northern workers, by its links with the ICTU. And we are told as well that this is a small scale affair which fails to permit the participation of the rank and file to any degree, and that in general, activity within the union branches is at a very low level -- things which no active trade unionist needs to be told, but problems which, as we shall see later, reflect the lack of a class lead given by the NIC tops, and have nothing whatsoever to do with its connections with the ICTU

What of the argument that employers in the north are mainly British? Employers, north, south and in Britain are more clearly allied now than ever. Capitalism has made one economic unit of these islands. The 'independent' republic of the twenty-six counties in economic terms is a fiction. After a period of protectionism in the south under DeValera the lack of growth of the economy underlined the inability of the southern ruling class to build an economy on their own. Protectionism had to be abandoned and the economy opened to British and International capital. In 1964 the Anglo Irish Free Trade Agreement was signed and the myth of economic independence was buried. As a result the south has increasingly become an economic appendage of the British mainland. That two-thirds of Britain's largest companies have subsidiaries in Southern Ireland is a reflection of this. The Southern bosses are merely a domesticated pet of the British. When the master applied to join the EEC one tug of the leash was enough to bring the twenty-six county puppy to heel and make it follow suit.

More clearly than ever workers throughout these islands are seen to face one common enemy - British Big Business. Certainly northern workers fight the same class enemy as the worker in London, Liverpool or Tyneside. But so too does the worker in the south. Dublin, Cork, Belfast, Glasgow or London - wage earners in all these centres must be bonded together. The EICU and WA would have their organisations retreat into separatism.

Trade Unions developed in Ireland on an all-Ireland basis. The early struggles of the new industrial unions at the end of the last century interlocked throughout Ireland. They also grew step by step with the developing British Labour Movement. Industrial struggles in Ireland often paralleled the first industrial awakenings of the British proletariat. It is this close historical bond which the WA wish to sever. Their proposals do not come from the traditions of the labour movement, nor are they raised to-day by people with a record of activity inside the unions. They are not the ideas of union activists but stem from the traditions of the enemies of the workers movement against whom its activists have always had to struggle.

The WA and the EICU demand the severing of trade union connections north and south. Yet trade unionists to whom they address these ideas have a right to be a little perplexed. Is not the British and Irish Communist Organisation one organisation? Does it not manage to operate in Britain and Ireland? Do not both this group and the Workers Association function on an all-Ireland basis? Perhaps we could suggest that if their ideas are really correct they might become more effective if they were to establish a separate 'Ulster' Workers Association!

#### A SECTARIAN SPLIT IN THE TRADE UNIONS

It is significant that the Ulster TU idea has not been fully thought out by the WA. The 'justifications' of it appear almost as an afterthought at the end of their pamphlet. Its structure, the precise nature of the links it would have with other trade union bodies, why it should have connections firstly with the British TUC and only then with the ICTU and what in concrete terms this amounts to, what it should do in the situation in NI to make itself more effective -- on all these questions we are left in the dark.



The demand for the splitting off from the Irish Congress has been voiced by Jim Smith and other leaders of the UWC. The UDA have given it their backing. It is their idea and was before them the idea of their forefathers. The WA have merely attempted to give it a theoretical colouring. There is every excuse for protestant workers to be confused on this issue in the context of the Northern Ireland situation. But the B&ICO are supposed to be 'marxists'. They are supposed to be capable of guiding the class struggle. This demand is not raised in the manner of marxism - it is raised with no thought given to its consequences.

The B&ICO have examined the situation with their intense theoretical glare? They have noted that the labour movement seems to be suffering from an illness and have come up with the only remedy they can think of - POISON!

The creation of an Ulster TUC would pave the way for a sectarian split within the unions in NI. For five years shop floor activists have grimly fought to prevent such an occurrence. Now they find that their enemies are being assisted by a group of so-called 'marxists'.

Boyd Black, spokesman for the WA, in a letter to the Irish Times (17/8/74) denies that his organisations' proposals would lead to sectarian trade unions. He says: "There is no trade-union reason why our suggestion would create protestant and catholic unions. It would only happen if there was a nationalist boycott of the new structure. But then we are used to that in NI".

In this facile manner can Boyd Black play with the prospect of sectarian unions. He can see no "trade-union reason" for a split arising as a result of his proposal. Only a "nationalist boycott" would bring this about. But then, Boyd Black and his friends are used to nationalist boycotts. In other words he expects that a split will occur, but since he will be able to blame the catholics for causing it, it merits no more importance in his mind than the casual observation, "But then we are used to that in NI". Has he perhaps forgotten that he is also proposing a campaign to drive 'nationalists' and 'republicans' out of trade union positions? Has he forgotten that he wants a unionist controlled Labour Movement?

A sectarian division within the unions would set the working class movement back for years. It is not a prospect that can be glibly mooted and then dismissed. To selfrighteously place the blame on the other side will not be enough in those circumstances. It will not help heal the split. Certainly there is no abstract 'trade union reason' why a change in the structure of the unions should result in a sectarian division. If the trade unions in Yorkshire decided to disaffiliate from the TUC and set up their own organisation, there would be no automatic 'trade union reason' why the new group would split down the middle.

But we are not concerned with such abstractions. What is at issue is the actual situation in NI. Socialists do not raise their programme in some timeless vacuum unaffected by real life situations. If we did we would still be mechanically repeating the demand of early trade unionists for the eight hour day. Demands relate to actual circumstances. A programme must be finely tuned to meet the needs of the hour and to point the way forward from there for the working class.

In the middle of the present sectarian conflagration in Northern Ireland the demand for an Ulster TUC is a certain recipe for a sectarian division to open itself up in the trade unions. It is something which would be resisted by

the entire leadership of the movement. It could only be achieved through a campaign, such as the WA propose, for loyalists to establish themselves in the leading trade union positions. This would play into the hands of those on both sides who wish to see the working class divided and weakened. On the catholic side there are those like Phil Curran, who has already mooted the idea, who would like to see a catholic trade union movement. These have their 'orange' counterparts in many of those involved in the UWC campaign who seek protestant domination over all the unions.

The reality of the situation is that if there was a 'protestant' take over of the NIC and the breakaway of this group from the ICTU, the ICTU unions would still operate in the north. Their support would be mainly catholic, but would include a whole layer of protestant industrial militants and shop floor activists. The result would be to leave the working class further weakened and divided.

Ammunition for reaction - stripped of all its finery this is what the WA proposal amounts to. It is fuel in the fire of those sectarians who wish to see the working class paralysed by its own divisions, so that they can the more easily stamp out the sparks of class militancy.

A final condemnation of the careless way in which this idea is raised is the statement that the new TUC will be "affiliated to the British TUC, the ICTU, and international labour bodies" (P.3) Here is revealed a complete ignorance of the purpose and structure of the organisations of the Trade Union Movement. There exists no possible way in which an 'Ulster TUC' could affiliate to, for example, the British TUC. A Scottish TUC now exists. It does not, nor can it, affiliate to the TUC. On the other hand trade unionists in Scotland, just as those in British based unions in NI, are already affiliated to and influence the British TUC in the only way they can - through their individual trade unions.

A Trade Union Congress is a body whose purpose is to co-ordinate the activities of different trade unions in a certain area. It's affiliated membership consists of individual unions, not of other TUCs. The WA claim they wish to introduce structural changes into the relationships between union organisations in these Islands in order to improve the workings of the unions. Yet they have not taken the trouble to examine the union structures carefully enough to discover what changes are even possible let alone necessary.

#### A COUNCIL OF LABOUR

Sunnindale was a reflection of the coming together of the representatives of Capital in Britain and in both parts of Ireland. It's proposal of a Council of Ireland has had to be withdrawn from public view following the UWC strike. But behind the scenes another 'council' has operated and continues to operate. This is a 'Council of Capital'

Bosses throughout the British Isles work hand in glove to counter the power of the working class. Labour organisations must likewise come together to co-ordinate the struggles of workers in Britain and Ireland. Such a coming together could be given organisational expression in the creation of a COUNCIL OF LABOUR consisting of representatives of the trade union and Labour organisations of the British Isles. When we talk of a change in the relationship between Labour bodies this is the change which must be discussed.

# THE 'MARXISM'

## OF THE B & ICO

When considering the ideas of this pamphlet it is also instructive to consider the organisations who support those ideas. The Workers Association is a loose group fathered by the British and Irish Communist Organisation. This group would lay claim to be 'marxist'. It is no such thing.

A 'Communist Party' as envisaged by Marx and Engels gathers within its rank the most advanced sections of the working class. It is the brain of that class and must give a lead to the broad mass of workers. It is not an elitist body cut off from workers and their organisations but must make itself a part of the day-to-day struggles and problems of the working class. In the 'Communist Manifesto' Marx and Engels detail its role.

Its propaganda, they say, must aim to weld the workers together as a class distinct from all other social class. Both its programme and its activity must be designed to raise the consciousness of workers, to give them an understanding of the task imposed upon them by history: to rid the globe of capitalist production and create a new social order. This does not place the Marxist leadership in the role of academic instructor - rather this leadership must be an integral part of the struggles of the workers' movement but must take each particular struggle and generalise it to show its significance in the fight against capitalism.

This the B&ICO do not even attempt to do. All their material is pitched at the lowest level of consciousness of the most backward, not the most class conscious workers. They make their starting point the lowest level of awareness of the class. And they advance that awareness not one step! Instead they seep into the minds of workers the poison of sectarianism and of nationalism. Neither their common interests as a class, nor their historical tasks, do they ever point out. In the context of NI the first can only be done by raising the slogan for the unity of the working class, catholic and protestant. The second by raising demands which challenge the existence of the capitalist system. The B&ICO fail on both counts. Rather their every speech, pamphlet and press utterance, could only have the effect of welding into the minds of protestants the notion that they are a distinct historically evolved group, and that, therefore, present day divisions are right and proper.

Marxism is based on firm ideas and perspectives. It begins from a scientific examination of any situation using the method of Marx and Engels themselves. These writers in the 'Communist Manifesto' explained that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". A Marxist tendency must understand the class forces at work in any situation, the relative strengths and weaknesses of the classes, and be capable of relating these to the changes in the economic situation. It must be able to couple an understanding of the objective factors in the situation, the economic factors for example, with a keen awareness of such subjective factors as the mood of the masses. Tendencies, groupings and sects who lack such an approach are incapable

of consistency. They do not understand the forces at work in a situation. Events therefore take them by surprise. They respond empirically to every new event, reacting with random changes in their programme and ideas, easily cavorting from one incorrect position to another. Such a group is the B&ICO. In fact they are a valuable museum relic of what Lenin denounced as 'infantile communists'

### PROTESTANT FASCISTS!!

In the late 1960s the B&ICO evolved a position diametrically opposed to that which they hold to-day. To-day they court the UDA, UVF and other para-military groups. In 1969 their attitude was somewhat different. At that time their leaflets were sold in catholic areas only. One headed "The struggle in the north" and dated 18/8/69 begins:

"The struggle of the Belfast workers from the Falls Road and other predominately catholic working class areas is not a sectarian war directed against protestant workers: it is a struggle against fascist terrorism. Fascist terrorism supported, equipped and financed by a substantial section of the Unionist Party and its administration. The Fascists have formed themselves into a number of front organisations such as the "Ulster Volunteer Force", the "Shankill Defence Association" and the "Ulster Constitutional Defence Committee".

Throughout the troubles of that period it was our present authors, with their now a most religious devotion to unionism, who screamed loudest for a United Ireland. Then their political instruments were tuned to the lowest level of outlook of catholics - the idea that those on the opposite side of the peace lines were fascist. Class ideas were then as conspicuous by their absence from their material as in the latest pamphlets. For all their troubles they got no thanks from the catholic working class. They met with total demise.

They did not disappear for long. Like the republican Pheonix they re-emerged rising out of the ashes of their past mistakes - except that from now on they were to be found on the other side of the barricades singing different songs altogether. Yesterday they denounced the protestants. To-day they denounce the catholics. Really the difference is not all that great! All they have done is rewrite all their old material, scoring out 'protestant' where it appears and inserting 'catholic'. Slogans which could lead to the uniting of the working class are nowhere and at no time raised.

### IS THE SOUTH TRYING TO TAKE OVER THE NORTH?

In 1969 the enemy was identified as British Imperialism. This concept has since disappeared from their thinking. Into its place, in the writings of the WA and the B&ICO, has stepped a new force - Southern Imperialism! This, we are told is the source of our problem. The Southern ruling class are trying to take us over! It is their 'undemocratic claims' which have ignited the powder keg of NI!

In reality the southern ruling class are little more than a shadowy reflection of British Capital. They act at the whims and dictates of the much more powerful British Big Business. It is nonsensical to put down all the problems of the north to the 'undemocratic claims' of the southern Government for jurisdiction over its territory' as do the B&ICO.

To these 'marxists' the provisionals are the 'unofficial army' of the Southern Government. In order to support the argument that the south is at work trying

to take over the six counties of NI, it is necessary to believe that Southern Capital, such as it exists, is behind the provisionals. They must be seen as an 'unofficial army' carrying on a struggle on behalf of the twenty six county government. That is why the Fianna Fail administration introduced emergency legislation to outlaw the IRA! That is why they reopened the Curragh Camp and brought in a back door form of internment of republicans!

To give them all due credit the B&ICO attempt to explain this apparent paradox. They state "if we are to talk of justice, Southern internment is infinitely less just than northern.... Over the past three years Republicans have been given every facility (including the very tangible support of eminent people in the state) for carrying out their campaign in the north. They have failed. Therefore they are being interned". (Workers Weekly 2/6/72) After three years of supporting them, we are to believe that the southern administration suddenly decided that the provisionals were not efficient enough and so interned them for - inefficiency!

In 1969 a section of the Southern ruling class, Blaney, Haughey and co. financed and helped form the provisionals. Why? To take over the north? No! Blaney and his friends saw and reacted to the developing movement to the left both north and south. They looked for a lever with which to break up that class movement. The lever was the provisionals. Blaney wished to use them to reactivate the germ of sectarianism and push the working class into the old ruts of unionism and nationalism.

Blaney does not represent the present day interests of the southern bosses. Cosgrave and Lynch, far more representative of the wishes of their masters, wish as far as possible to extricate themselves from the situation in the north. They wish to act at every turn as the backers of the policy of Westminster. Above all, far from working to bring it about, they tremble at the very prospect of a united Ireland because they are only too aware that if the might of the British Army cannot hold the situation in check, their tiny forces and state resources would be paralysed from the outset. They could never hope to contain a million hostile protestants. Nor would they be capable of gaining the support of the northern catholics who would never accept a cut in their social standards for the sake of 'unity'. Lynch and Cosgrave are alert to the fact that although catholic workers in the north might look to them to-day, in an all-Ireland under their leadership any support they now have would quickly turn to outright hostility as economic factors began to bite home.

The Southern Government must give "full recognition and accordance of the right of the Ulster Protestant nation to remain as part of the UK state". This would lead to a 'democratic settlement' of the conflict. So say the B&ICO. Northern Ireland has experienced five years of bloodshed. Thousands of families have been uprooted and forced to leave their homes. Over a thousand people are dead. The sectarian divide has never been wider. However there is no need to worry! The B&ICO have unearthed the cause of it all - the south is responsible! There would be no problem if only southern politicians would give up their claims on the territory of the north? As if, on the strength of a few words spoken by a group of politicians in the south, the problems built up over the last five years and longer will evaporate and a 'democratic solution' emerge.

#### THE TWO NATIONS THEORY - ITS IMPLICATIONS

Behind all the political wheelings and dealings of the B&ICO over the recent period stands the belief that Ireland is not one, but two nations. This theory is totally erroneous. Also its every implication is reactionary. (See article appended

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for an explanation of this theory). Yet even if Ireland were two nations, the method in which this theory is applied by the B&ICO has nothing in common with the methods of Marx, Engels or Lenin. Were a marxist to accept that Ireland is two nations he would not draw the totally false and one-sided conclusions drawn by these people.

A second part of the B&ICO and WA's 'democratic solution' is the accordance of democratic rights to the minority in NI. In words they occasionally say this. But the conclusion drawn from 99.9% of their material is just the opposite. In their publications every article is an attack on the southern government - the rights of catholics in the north are never expanded upon and explained. Quite the opposite! We have already seen how they denounced the civil rights campaign as a 'republican plot'. Not only the campaign itself but anyone who takes up the issue of civil rights including the trade union leaders, is branded as an enemy of the people of the north. They have nothing to say about the repression and harassment of catholics, the internment of their men, women and children - except to support it. "Internment must be retained until either the Provo campaign has been called off or until the Provos have been effectively disowned by the catholic community" (Workers Weekly 10/8/74)

In relation to any national struggle a marxist would support the rights of any oppressed minority within a nation. That would be his first and prime task. The B&ICO on every occasion are to be found on the side of the forces of the capitalist state against the minority in NI. Equally they are silent about the internment and harassment of 'loyalists'. Although a marxist would stand opposed to the methods of both the provisionals and groups such as the UDA and UVF he would be duty bound to oppose the repression used by the state forces against them.

Lenin in all his writings on the National Question always stressed the two sides to this issue. On the one hand a marxist tendency upholds the right, and it is only a right - not a duty, of an oppressed nation to secede. (Who NI is going to secede from is open to question?) On the other hand "while recognising equality and an equal right to a national state, it values above all, and places above all, the alliance of the proletarians of all nations, and evaluates every national demand, every national separation from the angle of the class struggle of the workers". (Lenin, Selected Works Vol I. P335)

The B&ICO see the first side but are completely blind when it comes to the second. Were there two nations in Ireland the question of a Socialist Ireland would still have to be posed. Marx himself, when writing about the oppression of Ireland by England advocated Irelands separation, but added the rider: "although after the separation there may come federation".

The 'right of self-determination' is no abstract cure all as the B&ICO tend to assume. It is merely a formula pulled out of history which must carefully and in a class manner, not mechanically, applied to any situation. What must be stressed in relation to a national struggle by a marxist would be decided only after an examination of that struggle "from the angle of the class struggle of the workers".

An independent class position in NI, reached in such a way, even in the event that there were two nations, would be to assail the leaders of the protestant community, together with the likes of Phil Curran, for their anti-working class sectarianism and to raise demands for the uniting of the working class north, south and in Britain.

During the UWC strike the Workers Association produced a series of Bulletins. (18)



They boast: "During the last days of the strike thousands of copies of the Bulletin were sold in the Shankill Rd., Sandy Row and East Belfast" Does this mark the intervention of Marxists in the situation? On the contrary. Nowhere in these Bulletins is there even one criticism of any, even the most right wing leaders of the strike. The Bulletins are without any attempt to take a class position as distinct from the stance of the UWC. Instead they declare the UWC to be "the most open minded as well as the most powerful political organisation in the protestant community"

These Bulletins as with the "Whats wrong with Ulster trade unionism" pamphlet come not from the "angle of the class struggle" but from the angle of loyalism and of sectarianism. Their material is totally uncritical of present day loyalist leaders, and lacks any suggestion as to what the working class should do independent of the middle class politicians. They conclude: "what the UWC have done during recent weeks is to give to the community the same quality of democratic, purposeful leadership that Carson and Craig did in 1912-1914".

Such material does only one thing - it provides a 'theoretical' gloss for sectarianism. Who invented the theory of the two nations? Marx? Engels? Lenin? No. Carson, Bonar Law, Craigavon and Brookeborough. Who upholds it today? Enoch Powell among others. These are the people who nurtured this ideological monstrosity. By your friends we know you!

What role does this 'theory' play in relation to the struggles of the working class? A strong Labour Movement in Northern Ireland would shatter the ties of sectarianism and bring workers together outside the bonds of Orange and Green torism. The two nations idea can only work against such a process and **in** such a situation would only help repair the manacles which have bound workers on both sides to right wing and sectarian influence. It would only serve to smother the independent aspirations of the working class with the same 'democratic and purposeful' ideas as once used by Carson and Craig to the same end.

The UWC, which the WA and B&ICO applauded until their hands were sore is already beginning to fragment. Many of its supporters now have doubts in their minds about this or that aspect of its activity and are looking round for some way out. All the B&ICO have to say to these workers is that they should stay with the UWC. But despite the activities of the WA and B&ICO the protestant bloc must shatter. A growing class movement would cut through the camp of 'loyalism' and draw to its side the mass of the protestant working class. When this happens the B&ICO, all their false theories with them, will be swallowed in the crevice which will divide protestant workers from their exploiters and overlords.

# FOR WORKERS UNITY

The theory of the two nations together with the bulk of B&ICO and WA material, is born out of pessimism and despair. Throughout all the ziz-zags and turns of this tendency since 1969, there runs one common strand - a complete lack of faith in the ability of the working class to come together. They are not the only prophets of gloom in NI. Other 'socialists' lean to the provisionals for succour. Both seek short cuts, easy paths to socialism, by ignoring either the catholic or the protestant working class. Neither are concerned with raising the interests of workers as a whole.

Workers unity - in the eyes of such 'socialists' this is a joke. It remains the key to the entire situation. After five years in which workers have been blasted into opposing sectarian camps, in which bloody sectarian killing has been the order of the day, the building of a movement which can bring the working class people together is more clearly seen as the only way to stop the bloodshed.

The B&ICO disagree. They prefer a 'democratic solution'. In practical terms this means that they are prepared to forgo the task of building a class movement and instead rely on the ruling class. It comes down to support for the policies and methods of British Big Business in NI. Thus this group has backed the various initiatives which have come from Westminster including the Sunningdale Agreement (although they also backed the UWC strike to destroy Sunningdale), they support the army in its repressive role and are in favour of Internment. In short they have utterly deserted the camp of Marx, Engels and Lenin who taught as a first, most elementary principle that the working class must rely on its own forces, and not look for aid to the state forces of its class enemy.

But above all the B&ICO have failed to grasp the most obvious conclusion which flows from the turmoil of the last five years - that the British ruling class have no answer to the problems facing the people of NI.

## BRITISH BIG BUSINESS OFFERS NO SOLUTION

The British bosses fostered sectarianism in the past. They partitioned Ireland, not to separate two hostile nations, but to drive a wedge of bitterness into the ranks of the working class and so impede the development of the Labour Movement, North and South. British Capital no longer wishes to rule through religious demagogues such as Carson and Craigavon. Because of the opening up of the Southern economy, the growth of trade with that country and the pumping of capital into it, they would prefer to see a united Ireland - on a capitalist basis of course. This was their intention through the period of the sixties and it was reflected in the historic meeting of O'Neill and Lemass. In the way of all the plans of the British bosses stand the gigantic fires of sectarianism which were lit and fueled from Westminster and which refuse to extinguish themselves now that their old stokers no longer require their services.

Governments at Westminster have produced a host of paper solutions to the NI problem. 'Initiatives' of one sort or another, White papers and Greenpapers have appeared. But valleys conflict and division cannot be bridged with pieces of paper. The latest proposal for a NI Convention will no more 'solve' the problem than did its predecessors.

Beneath the surface of the sectarian carnage workers of both communities struggle to exist in an arena of poverty and virtual destitution. Wages in NI are an average £5 lower than in England. Even the supposedly 'privileged' shipyard workers have been demonstrated to be taking home in some cases as much as £11 per week less than their counterparts across the water. 100,000 houses in NI are unfit for human habitation. 30,000 of these are in Belfast. Chronic unemployment exists in many areas. The dole queue is no stranger to working class families in such towns as Derry, Strabane and Newry. In Ballymurphy, it has been estimated that up to 40% of the males are out of work. (1973 figure)

These are the problems which underlie the situation. In 1968 the Civil Rights Movement gained its mass working class base as a response to the desperate conditions faced by those within the catholic ghettos. Fear of more unemployment and further poverty lay behind the resistance which developed among protestant workers to the CR campaign. A 'solution' to the NI situation means the eradication of these miseries; it means jobs houses and decent wages for all, otherwise it is no solution at all.

The British ruling class have only one reply to give to the economic demands of workers - cuts in living standards so that the proportion of the national cake sliced off in profits can be maintained and increased. Wage restraint while prices rocket! Inflation has now reached a giddy annual rate of 20%. Economic stagnation while workers idle on the dole! Capitalist economists are now gloomily discussing the prospect of a period of no growth in the economy. Those with the money are now refusing to invest it with the result that the economy is stagnating and, according to the forecasts of the ruling class economists, unemployment is likely to rise to over one and a half million in the next eighteen months.

All that the ruling class can offer workers in Britain is an attempt to lower their standard of living. In Northern Ireland a future of poverty, military harassment and no end to sectarianism is about the best prospect they can give. Only the working class can find an outlet. Not the Tories! Not the paramilitary groups! Not the provisionals whose campaign is doomed to defeat and which can only deepen the polarisation! The Labour Movement must give the alternative.

#### WORKERS CAN BE UNITED

The uniting of catholic and protestant workers in struggle is no utopian fantasy. Time after time Belfast's workers have fought side by side; in 1907 under the leadership of Larkin, in 1919 in a virtual general strike over the question of hours of work, in 1932 when unemployed workers in the Falls and the Shankill areas came together against police and army attack.

On a day to day basis on the shop floor workers have been and are united. The very existence of the trade union movement is alone enough to answer the arguments of those who dismiss the possibility of united class action. Above all, the fact that amid the last few years of sectarian fighting, a host of strikes have taken place in Belfast, is a sure sign that with further attacks on living standards, working class unity and solidarity is not only possible, it is practically inevitable.

Hardly any section of workers in Belfast have not been forced to take industrial action in the last four or five years. The shipyard men have gone on strike. Engineering workers have joined with their colleagues in England on the issue of the A.U.E.W. fines. These "heavy battalions" of labour have been joined by a host of other workers, some of them in professions which have never before seen strike action - postmen, the Ulsterbus maintenance workers, the Michelin workers, council workers, civil servants, hospital staff, the list goes on and on. Sectarianism has broken the solidarity of not one of these disputes. A cut-back in living standards will mean that, despite the religious hatred, such struggles will mushroom.

Even in the face of the most intense sectarian bitterness, the bud of class unity has not been crushed. Recent years have seen enormous political realignments on both sides. In each community there have been developments towards the left. Among catholic based organisations, particularly the Official Republican Movement, there has been a current of class feeling. Countless splits have reduced the Unionist monolith, which for fifty years held solid, to a heap of stones. Every protestant organisation has experienced splits, some of which have reflected attempts to move to the left, to the establishment of a purely working class movement. The UWC is already divided into a multitude of warring factions, some with the extreme right wing ideas of the National Front, while others direct their gaze leftward.

The very confusion which now exists in all established organisations who have a working class base, the tendency for these organisations to split, is a reflection, in a distorted form, of a desire among workers to find a way out. It reveals a certain tiredness among workers of the organisations they have looked to for the past few years.

To date any leftward tendencies have come to nothing. They will continue to come to nothing unless a lead is given by the Labour Movement. No organisation can bring workers together other than the Labour and the Trade Union Movement. When it fails to provide an alternative workers find they have no other political home except within the sectarian blockades.

#### LABOUR MUST GIVE A CLASS LEAD

The Labour Movement has been pushed into the background during recent years. It has lost enormous ground. To rectify this the B&ICO and WA propose the creation of an Ulster TUC. What of this new organisation once these people get their way and set it up? What should it do to intervene in the NI situation? What should it do to offset the attempts of the ruling class to hold down the living standards of its members? How should it intervene in the political arena? Anyone who seeks an answer to these questions in the WA pamphlet is wasting his time.

Yet if the weakness of the Labour Movement is to be overcome these are precisely the questions which must be given an answer. Splitting the trade union movement in two is not that answer. Over the past five years the NIC, as with the NILP, has failed because it has preferred to sit back and watch rather than intervene in the situation. In 1968 the leaders of the Labour Movement took a silent decision that they were not really relevant to the developing trouble. They thought it best to merely sit and wait for 'normality' to return. Consequently Northern Irish workers also decided that they were irrelevant.

There are 263,000 trade unionists in NI. In terms of numbers they are the

decisive force in the situation. Because this mass of workers has been given no lead from the terms of their movement they have been allowed to dissipate in the direction of a variety of sectarian based groups.

Five years ago the leaders of the Labour Movement should have seized the initiative. They could then have drawn mass support to a class programme and class action. Then they would have been working under conditions a thousand times more favourable than those of the present. Today they are greatly weakened but still retain the power to intervene decisively.

In 1969 it was the trade unions who used their influence to help keep the peace. An example of what could have been achieved was the mass meeting of 9,000 shipyard workers in August 1969. This meeting condemned sectarianism and was one of the factors which eased the situation in East Belfast. This tenuous unity which arose out of a tenth of a lead on the part of the trade unions in 1969, has been blasted asunder by the provisional IRA and by the activities of the protestant para military groups.

Only the Labour Movement has the ability to once again forge a bond between catholic and protestant workers. If the key to the situation is the uniting of the working class, this key now lies and for five years has lain in the laps of the trade union and Labour leadership.

Only the Labour Movement can on the one hand end sectarianism and on the other emancipate workers from economic bondage. Only a party based on the trade unions can unite workers in political struggle. A campaign should be launched by the trade union leadership centred on two major questions. Firstly to unite workers in defence of their lives against sectarian attack. Under the overall control of the Trade Union Movement a Defence force should be set up. Already on the shop floor the unions give a limited protection against sectarian thuggery. This should be extended to include protection of workers on their way to and from work and in the working class estates themselves. The British Army offers oppression not protection. It must be withdrawn and a workers Defence organisation mobilised to replace it.

Secondly workers must be drawn together in defence of living standards. Demands for a minimum wage of £35 for a £35 hour week and tied to the cost of living, for a crash housing programme, for the nationalisation of all building land and of the building supply industry, for an end to redundancies and instead work sharing with no loss in pay, for £35 hours work or £35 hours pay, and to make all these possible the Nationalisation of the Banks, Insurance Companies and all major industries and the placing of these in the hands of the working class through a system of democratic workers management, all must be raised & spelt out in an agitational and popular fashion as the subject of a wide campaign.

Linked with this must be the question of a political expression for the working class. The majority of unions in the North are linked through affiliation to the Northern Ireland Labour Party. The present leadership of this party are attempting to steer it away from its class origins in the direction of the sectarian policies recommended by the WA and B&ICO. It is the party of the trade unions. It is up to them to intervene, by becoming active within that party at branch, executive and conference levels, to ensure that it fights on the above programme and not on the ideas of the pro-protestant WA.

#### ULSTER TUC - A FINAL WORD

The Workers Association pamphlet quite correctly points to and stresses

the failure of the Right to Work marches organised by leading trade unionists during the UWC strike. From this failure the WA conclude that any attempt at intervention on the part of the trade union leadership is unwanted. The Right to Work marches failed not because it is wrong for the trade unions to intervene, but because, as a lead, it was too little and too late. It was five years too late and it was too little to be effective. Its only chance of success would have been if it had been something more than a negative lead, against the strike, but a positive lead, on the ideas and programme outlined above, giving a class alternative to Sunningdale. Had this been done and had the organisers undertaken to have a force of trade union stewards, armed with clubs, numerous and strong enough to protect the marchers, it would have signalled not their demise, but the emergence of the trade unions as a force to be reckoned with in Northern Ireland.

An Ulster TUC would in no way assist those who are struggling for class unity and socialism in NI. On this basis alone the idea must be rejected. It is highly significant that the proposal has received only the faintest echo within the Organised Labour Movement. It has been raised by a group whose orientation has been and still is away from the Official Labour organisations, including the trade unions. In 1969, when the B&ICO were attempting to court the Catholics, they assigned no role to the trade unions. Today it is not to the Labour Movement but to such 'progressives' as the British Tories, the UWC and Messrs. Craig, Paisley and West that they look for a political lead.

The B&ICO are unique. On the one side they claim to be 'Marxists', yet, on the other, they demand the carving up of working class organisations and work to give those organisations a pro-unionist and sectarian leadership. They are an historical 'curiosity' created by the events in NI and the setbacks which the working class have suffered. History created them. History in turn will pass them by. Their ultimate fate - to be a footnote in the history of 'loyalism'.

The future of Ireland is in the hands of the working class. Standing together it will be the working class who will write the next chapters of Irish history.



# TWO NATIONS ?

## BANKRUPTCY OF THEORIES OF O'BRIEN AND "MARXIST" SECTS

"The petit bourgeoisie change their ideas like a man changes his shirt," Trotsky once wrote. Incapable of standing on firm principles and fighting against hostile and backward currents of thought in the workers' movement, the middle class politician and middle-class political tendencies usually opportunistically bend under pressure. This often means that the position which was stubbornly defended yesterday is unceremoniously abandoned today, without any explanation or attempt to justify the change in policy.

Such is the position of Conor Cruise O'Brien and those 'Marxist' tendencies who have embraced the "theory" that there are "two nations" in Ireland, a Protestant nation and a "Catholic nation". Invariably these same tendencies in the past adopted the position of Catholic nationalists by implicitly characterising the Protestant population of the North as alien, sometimes as "colons" or at best as being incapable of rising to the same level of consciousness and fighting spirit as the Catholic workers. Conor Cruise O'Brien, for instance, wrote articles in 1966 praising uncritically the leaders of the 1916 uprising and the role of Republicans in general, in the national independence struggle.

Some of the "Marxist" sects on the other hand, quoted articles of James Connolly in such a manner as to make him a Catholic Nationalist par excellence.

### WHAT IS A NATION?

The adoption of the "two nations" theory is born out of a despair that the present religious polarisation in Northern Ireland is fixed once and for all, that real unity between Catholic and Protestant workers cannot be achieved and consequently all that remains is to permanently fix these divisions by recognising two nations and two separate states.

Such an analysis, at the same time as being profoundly pessimistic, does not stand up to any serious examination from a Socialist or Marxist standpoint. What is a nation?

Marxists do not characterise any assortment of individuals as a nation. Otherwise any odd group, religion etc would be able to arbitrarily declare itself a nation. Nations and the formation of the modern nation state, came into existence with the development of capitalism itself, with the breaking down of medieval particularism and a corresponding centralisation of capital, peoples and markets as a pre-condition for the development of the productive forces, ie. science, technique and the organisation of labour. Historical experience has shown that for a nation to remain viable and not subject to continual break up, it has to have certain common characteristics. These are a common language, a common territory, a common and quite distinct economic cohesion and a common culture. If any one of these factors is missing, then history has shown the

tendency towards dissolution will be manifested at a certain stage.

In what way then does the protestant 'nation' meet these requirements? A common language? The proponents of the theory of 'two nations', feeling their weakness on this question, are forced to harken back to the earlier part of the nineteenth century, to prove that there were two different languages spoken by catholic and protestant. Both now speak English as their major tongue. Irish is only used as a first language by a minority, even in the South.

A distinct national territory? Right from its inception, the six counties included two overwhelming Catholic counties, Fermanagh and Tyrone. The logic of the demand for a separate territory for the Protestants would be the establishment of a four county state, with a Protestant majority. The inclusion of Fermanagh and Tyrone in the six counties at the time of partition was because the Unionists themselves realised that their state was completely unviable on the basis of four counties. Economically also the Unionist regime has always relied on the enormous subventions British Imperialism.

What about a common culture? At the time of the plantations, the Protestant population emanated from a different culture from that of the native Irish. With the development of Industry and a modern economy, the tendency towards the co-mingling of the catholic and protestant was only cut across by the British Imperialists, firstly by the deliberate fostering of sectarian divisions for political, military and economic reasons, and in the past by the deepening of the sectarian divide by the Paisleyites on the one side, and the Provisional IRA on the other. More examples can be given to show that the Protestant worker considers himself as an Irishman, than can be adduced to prove any separate 'nationality'.

Thus the numerous Protestant Republican martyrs, beginning with Wolfe Tone, and the Independent Orange Order which in 1906 and 1907 broke away from the main Orange Order, taking with it the majority of working class lodges in Belfast.

They linked up with James Larkin who was able to forge an alliance of Catholic and Protestant workers fighting together on class issues.

#### PROTESTANTS ARE IRISHMEN

The Manifesto of the Independent Orange Order demonstrated that even these 'orange' workers, who started off as a right wing, viciously sectarian organisation, considered themselves as Irishmen.... "As Irishmen we do not seek to asperse the memory of the hallowed dead (but)....to bridge the gulf that has so long divided Ireland into hostile camps and to hold out the hand of fellowship to those who, while worshipping at other shrines are yet our fellow countrymen!" (from Emmet Larkin's biography of James Larkin)

Quite apart from this, in every 'national culture' there are in reality two cultures, the culture of the capitalists and landlords, and that of the workers. ie. class solidarity and international brotherhood. Catholic and Protestant have fought together shoulder to shoulder on many occasions against their common exploiters.

The argument that the Protestant population must be a nation because there is a Protestant capitalist class in the North, arises from a complete misunderstanding of the national question from a Marxist and Socialist standpoint.

Firstly, there were Jewish capitalists in Russia before 1917, but this did not mean that at that stage there was a Jewish 'nation'. The Russian marxists specifically rejected this idea, characterising the Jews as a specially OPPRESSED CASTE.

The Georgian Jew was closer in all respects to the Georgian workers and peasants

than to the Ukrainian Jew, save for the religious question. The religion of the Protestant worker is a reflection of the cultural conditions of the past. It can only continue to hold the worker in its grip given the backwardness of the Labour Movement in Northern Ireland, allied to the fact that some Labour leaders also seek to reinforce the religious bigotry and backwardness of the Protestant workers by the injection of false ideas about 'Protestant Nationality'.

### IMPERIALISM DIVIDED IRELAND

Ireland was not divided, as is claimed by some, because of the separate development of a Protestant industrial capitalist class in Northern Ireland. The Unionist bosses were a component part of British Imperialism. If the British ruling class could have guaranteed a limited 'independence' for Ireland, while still maintaining their military and naval base together with their economic stranglehold, they would have been prepared to come to terms with the emerging southern capitalist class.

The factors which prevented such a deal were on the one side fear of the social revolution which underlay the liberation struggle from 1916 to 1923 and was reflected in the occupations of the land by the small farmers and the mass strikes during the Civil War in 1923. They were afraid that the contagion in the South would spread to the North. Hence their determination to stave off this threat by inflaming sectarian passions. On the other was the need to guarantee Ireland as a military outpost - the 'guardian of the freedom of the seas'.

It is precisely because some of these factors have been rendered obsolete by the developments in the South and in the North in the last 50 years, that the British ruling class have now proposed the unification of Ireland on a capitalist basis. With the decline in the military and the economic power of British Imperialism, their reliance on sea bases has diminished. Southern Ireland as much as the North is bound hand and foot to the British economy.

The only thing which stands in the way of British Imperialism having its way is the monster of sectarianism, its own creation which refuses to lie down. The Protestant population, nourished by the British ruling class on this diet, see any suggestion of a capitalist united Ireland as a threat to them,

The acceptance of the position that there is a separate Protestant 'nation' in Northern Ireland is not only thoroughly false but in practice can objectively aid reaction. This is particularly the case with the position of those 'marxists' sects which accept this 'theory' and at the same time restrict themselves to calling for the 'right of self-determination' for the Protestants without raising even once the idea of socialism as a way out of the crisis which faces Protestant and Catholic workers alike. In practice, they adopt the standpoint of Paisley and Craig, fueling the sectarian fires with ill-digested arguments borrowed from Marxism.

### A SOCIALIST UNITED IRELAND

The rank and file of the Irish Labour Movement, North and South, must reject these ideas, which are a barrier to the uniting of Protestant and Catholic workers in action against the Green and Orange bosses alike. A united Ireland will be realised, but only on the basis of the socialist transformation of society. The Protestant workers can be won to the idea of the unification of the country if this is linked to solutions to the problems he faces, ie, unemployment, housing, education, starvation wages etc. The only weapon which can bring this about is the united Labour Movement, which in the North alone is a quarter of a million strong. This giant will be aroused to action on a programme of socialist change which will, in the process, push aside the purveyors of Protestant 'nationalism' and their Catholic counterparts.

(REPRINTED FROM MILITANT IRISH MONTHLY JAN. 1972.) By PETER TAAFFE

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