

POLITICS FROM THE PRISONS

AND OTHER ARTICLES ABOUT IRELAND



RUC policemen batoning mourners at a Republican funeral

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POLITICS FROM THE PRISONS

The three articles that follow, reviewing "Questions of History" by Irish Republican prisoners, appeared in "Workers Press" on December 19 1987, and January 2 and 9 1988.



The Bolsheviks regarded the Russian workers as the leading force in the revolution: here is a workers' demonstration in 1905

Class struggle and national struggle

'QUESTIONS of History', written by Irish Republican Prisoners of War and published by the Sinn Fein Education Department, is an exceptional book.

If previously we thought of self-sacrifice and defiant courage as the prisoners' great strengths, now we must add another: they are making a vital contribution to political discussion.

'Questions of History', Part 1, surveys the history of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland from 1798 to 1934. The historical narrative is interrupted with very piercing questions from the prisoners, some of which we offer our comments on.

The first question posed is a crucial one: 'what class is to lead the struggle for national liberation?' (p.15).

(This question appears in the chapter on the 1798 uprising. There is no room in this article to deal with the role of the Irish bourgeoisie then, or throughout the 19th century. We will concentrate on the present.)

Today, with imperialism internationally gripped by historical crisis, when in Ireland majority of the population have long ago been concentrated in the towns, when the Irish bourgeoisie has 65 years ago irretrievably betrayed the national struggle and signed the Treaty, there can be a clear answer: the working class.

Of course the idea of working-class leadership in the national struggle was first advanced when the working class was still a minority of the population, a quarter of a century before the Treaty — by James Connolly.

As 'Questions of History' says, he 'strove to create a consciousness and awareness amongst the working

BY SIMON PIRANI

class which would unite them against their capitalist oppressors' (p.60).

What about alliances between the working class and bourgeois forces in the national struggle?

'Despite his suspicions,' say the authors, 'Connolly nevertheless felt that it was correct to align himself with the most progressive section of the national bourgeoisie.'

'This was in line with the thinking of the Russian Marxist, Lenin, who felt that socialists should align themselves with what is progressive — and only progressive — in the context of another class.

'In the struggle for Irish self-determination, the battle to reject the British, in which the bourgeoisie participated, constituted the progressive element in that context which Connolly aligned himself with.

'Given this approach of Connolly's, could there exist a progressive element in the context of, say, the SDLP or Fianna Fail, now, or in the future, which could provide the basis for a possible

alliance or united front between these groups or sections of them and the Republican Movement.' (pp 65-6).

This question of class alliances is so central that there can't be any confusion on it.

Since Connolly and Lenin both saw the working class, internationally, as the motive force of historical change, they never considered anything but temporary, expedient, practical alliances with bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces — with the working class marching under an independent, socialist programme, towards its own historical goal.

In 1897, with brilliant historical foresight, Connolly defended his aim of a 'socialist republic' from those who said it would 'alienate all our middle-class and aristocratic supporters'.

'If you ask me to abate one jot or tittle of the claims of social justice, in order to conciliate the privileged classes, then I must decline.' ('Socialism and Nationalism').

Connolly never changed this view. It is not true — as Sean O'Casey writes in his history of the Irish Citizens'

Army, for example — that Connolly abandoned socialism for nationalism when the first world war broke out.

He was determined to carry through the Easter Rising precisely because of his socialist internationalism: he feared the war would physically destroy millions of workers, and — as 'Questions of History' states clearly — believed it vital to detonate revolutionary struggles by whatever means, viewing the 1916 rising as 'a blow against world imperialism' (p.65).

Neither did Connolly drop his criticisms of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces, even the IRB with whom he organised the rising — and 'Questions of History' points this out.

But he lacked the means to mobilise the working class in revolutionary struggle.

Connolly, following the American syndicalist tradition, believed that the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, rather than a revolutionary party, could fulfil that role.

But it was already under reformist control and played no part in the rising. (We will return to this in another article.)

In the struggle against Tsarist autocracy in Russia, before the 1905 revolution, Lenin also advocated an alliance with certain bourgeois forces — with bourgeois liberalism against Tsarism.

But he always saw that alliance as temporary, its purpose being not to strengthen the liberals, but to unmask them as vacillators in front of the whole democratic movement.

Both before and after 1905, all the Russian revolutionaries, understanding that the revolution was fighting to achieve democracy, and agrarian reform, emphasised its 'bourgeois character'.

The Mensheviks concluded that the working class could thus only play a supporting role, with the bourgeois forces leading the way.

They were bitterly opposed by Lenin, who insisted that only the Russian working class, allied with the huge peasantry, could carry through the bourgeois revolution, and thus advanced the slogan 'for the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'.

Along with Lenin, Trotsky attacked the Mensheviks for surrendering the revolution's leadership to the bourgeoisie; his 'theory of permanent revolution' differed from Lenin's slogan only in that it insisted the working class would have the leading role and the peasantry would follow it.

In February 1917 Russia was plunged into revolution, the best possible test of all theories about class alliances.

The liberal bourgeoisie took power, and in maintaining capitalist rule they received vital support from the Mensheviks.

Lenin, who had never thought of the alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie as more than a passing phase, argued that the working class had to seize power from them immediately, aiming to win the support of the peasantry with the slogan 'bread, peace and land'.

He bitterly conflicted on this score with the majority of Bolshevik leaders, who closed their eyes to the class character of the liberal bourgeois regime, decided that it represented the 'democratic dictatorship' they had advocated, and gave it 'conditional' support.

With Trotsky's help, Lenin overturned this position inside the Bolshevik party, enabling it to lead the first successful workers' revolution in November that year.

So, even when the working class was a small minority of the population, far more so in Russia than in Ireland, tactical alliances with the bourgeoisie were strictly

subordinated to the strategic goal of working-class power.

It is necessary to say all this, because in the 20s, in the era of imperialist domination, after the national bourgeoisie in Ireland, India, China and elsewhere had carried out historic betrayals — the Communist International under Stalin adopted the Menshevik line of 'class blocs' and 'people's



James Connolly

fronts' against imperialism, trying to claim that this policy was Lenin's.

But these were strategic compromises with the national bourgeoisie, not tactical alliances. The difference between these is a matter of life and death.

What does all this mean for Ireland in 1987? Fianna Fail represents not a bourgeoisie that desperately needs to achieve democratic reforms or national liberation to go forward, but one whose interests are best served by alliances with British and US imperialism.

The SDLP represents the most cowardly section of the labour bureaucracy which accepted partition in 1922 and works to preserve the six-county state.

Sinn Fein, which has almost entirely working-class support, and has maintained its support for the armed struggle, nevertheless advocates a middle-class reformist political and economic programme.

The vital need today is for a revolutionary working-class leadership, standing on the shoulders of Connolly and Lenin, which understands the working class as a motive force in history, not a passive object.

Only with such a party can the working class develop its political independence; and that political independence is the essential prerequisite for the working class to take advantage of any temporary, tactical alliances with other forces.

This view of the working class — as a motive force of history and not a passive object — is the only one from which the question of the protestant workers of Ireland can be tackled.

Referring to the explosive situation after the first world war, in which imperialism faced mounting industrial

struggles in Belfast and impending civil war in Dublin, 'Questions of History' asks whether in such a 'situation of dire poverty', the unionist workers could 'come to reject unionism and embrace socialism. Or even in such circumstances would the Orange supremacist ideology be too strong?' (p. 111).

Further on, the authors quote David Reed of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), who claims in his 'Ireland: Key to the British Revolution' that the loyalist cross-class alliance 'can never be destroyed unless the prop of the union with Britain is taken away.'

'Questions of History' asks: 'Can the working class in the north become united for long enough to perceive British imperialism as the ultimate enemy of their real interests, working in collusion with the unionist bourgeoisie, and upon the basis of that perception, actively participate in the process aimed at defeating that imperialism and its allies; or is the line of argument pursued by David Reed essentially correct?' (p. 135).

It is impossible to answer these questions unless the Irish situation is understood in the context of the historical crisis of imperialism. That crisis — most clearly evident in the recent stock-market crash — has the most severe effect on Britain, which far from being the world's leading imperialist power as it was when the monster of unionism was first brought to life, is today a poor cousin of US imperialism. Historically it is in decline.

In the end, this will be decisive in sealing the fate of the unionist bourgeoisie. The linen and shipbuilding industries from which they got their wealth, built up by Britain in the last century, have all but collapsed.

'Questions of History' cor-

rectly says that 'a virtual monopoly of the better paid skilled jobs' enabled the unionist bourgeoisie 'to create among the protestants an aristocracy of labour who would lead the protestant working class in the direction required by the interests of the bourgeoisie' (p. 108).

One characteristic of the present imperialist crisis is its devastating impact on the privileges of the labour aristocracy — in the imperialist countries themselves, and Ireland too.

It is this fact that must, in the end, produce the possibility of uniting protestant and catholic workers. But unity will be realised only in the course of revolutionary struggles: that is to say, not by large numbers of protestant workers 'embracing socialism'.

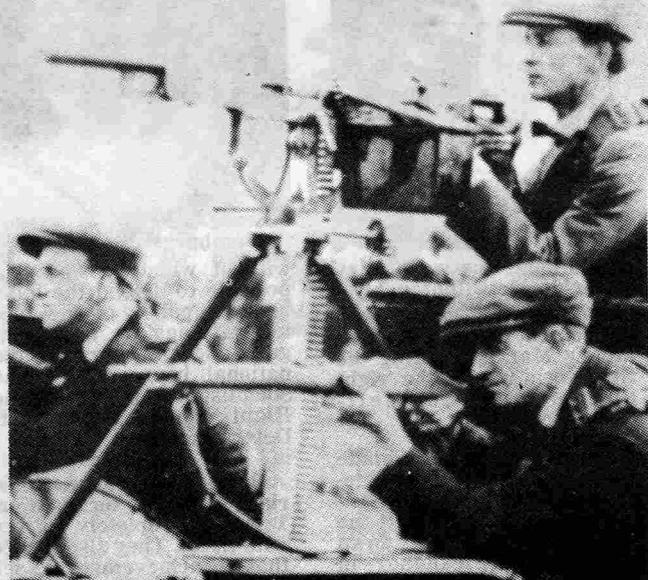
Probably, before the working class has been 'united for long enough to perceive imperialism as the ultimate enemy' and 'act on that perception', imperialism will strike such terrible blows at protestant workers that it will force many of them into united struggles against their will and expectations. Because class struggle does not develop according to consciousness.

Of course partition deepens the divisions and can yet make them more violent. But David Reed's mechanical view that the working class can not be united, until imperialism is defeated, must be rejected.

It discounts the working class — albeit at present divided — as the major force in defeating imperialism.

It ignores the fact that imperialism and its six-county state which bred and suckled loyalism are themselves in mortal crisis.

Thus Reed opens the door for a 'stages' theory that rigidly separates national unification from the struggle for socialism as a whole.



The six-county state 'bred and suckled' loyalism: here Ulster Volunteers train to defend the reactionary Union with Britain

Trotskyism

and nationalism

AFTER the 1916 rising, 'it wasn't only Connolly's class enemies who condemned him, some British and European socialists did too, with notable exceptions being the historian T. A. Jackson, the Scottish labour organiser John Maclean and Lenin,' says 'Questions of History' (p. 70).

Among those who criticised the rising was the Russian Marxist, Trotsky. He claimed it was the work of 'national dreamers'. He felt that a nationalist rising, particularly one in a European country, where the working class proletariat had achieved a measure of strength and social consciousness, was of little significance and that only pure working-class socialist revolution was of any importance. Subsequently Trotskyists today play down the importance of the question of national liberation for the working class. Lenin however saw things differently. He felt that in the era of world imperialism it was correct for the working class to engage in a national liberation struggle against imperialism. According to Lenin, imperialism is the highest form of capitalism.'

Several vital points are



Radek

raised here, and we will try to tackle them thoroughly.

Firstly, we need to look at the content of the discussion among Marxists during the first world war on the 'right of nations to self-determination'.

The imperialists had made the war in the name of 'defending small nations' (Belgium etc), and this split the Second International down the middle. Plekhanov in Russia, Kautsky in Germany, and other great

'orthodox Marxists' supported the war.

Those internationalists who opposed the slaughter, and called for it to be turned into a civil war of the working class against capitalism, included Connolly, Maclean, Trotsky, Lenin and other Russian revolutionaries such as Radek and Bukharin, and Leibknecht and Luxemburg in Germany.

All these Marxists were united by their opposition to nationalism as a political tendency; they all regarded the international struggle of the working class for socialism as their starting-point.

'Questions of History' is unclear about Lenin's standpoint. He did not, either before, during or after the war, call on the working class to 'engage in' the national liberation struggle as such; rather he insisted that the working class had to defend the right of nations to self-determination. Workers in imperialist countries thus had to aid such struggles — even when they had a petty-bourgeois or bourgeois character — against their 'own' imperialist rulers; in oppressed countries, the accent was on the need to 'defend and implement the full and unconditional unity . . . of the workers of the oppressed nation and those of the oppressor nation',



Luxemburg

without which it was 'impossible to defend the independent policy of the proletariat' against the 'intrigues and treachery' of the national bourgeoisie. ('The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination').

On defence of nations' right to self-determination, Trotsky completely agreed with Lenin. They also agreed that the achievement of such rights was indissolubly tied up with socialist revolution.

'Victorious socialism must necessarily establish a full democracy and, consequently . . . realise the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination', wrote Lenin.

In his article 'Nation and Economy', Trotsky made more explicit the limitations imposed on national movements by economic developments in imperialism. He then stated, 'we do not intend



Trotsky

to throw overboard the right of nations to self-determination. On the contrary, we think that the epoch is approaching (i.e. that of socialist revolution) when this right can at last be realised.' He added that this demand should be linked with the slogan for a united socialist states of Europe.

Other socialists rejected the slogan for 'national self-determination', not on social-chauvinist grounds — these were internationalists who had opposed the war —

but because they believed it unachievable under capitalism, and unnecessary under socialism.

This mechanical view was taken by Russians Radek, Bukharin and Pyatakov, together with the Dutch internationalists. (When they founded the paper 'Vorbote' in 1915, Trotsky wrote to them, mentioning their opposition to national self-determination as one of his reasons for not joining the editorial board).

The great revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, obsessed with opposing reactionary bourgeois nationalism in her Polish homeland, also conflicted with Lenin from a similar standpoint.

The Dublin uprising led by Connolly was a powerful test of all views.

Radek dismissed it as a 'putsch', and — ignoring the role of the working class — wrongly characterised it as 'a purely urban petty-bourgeois movement'.

Lenin fiercely attacked Radek, pointing out that the street fighting was 'conducted by a section of the urban petty bourgeoisie and a section of the workers' (Lenin's emphasis). To dismiss the rising as a 'putsch', Lenin pointed out, was to ignore the fact that 'the socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and backward workers will partici-

pate in it.' ('The Irish Rebellion of 1916').

Trotsky concurred with Lenin that the working class had played a crucial role; he attacked both the British social-chauvinists with their 'hooligan blood-lust', and the Russian social-chauvinist Plekhanov who described the rising as 'harmful'; he praised Casement's courage.

It is in this context that we should read the remark: 'A nationwide movement, such as the nationalist dreamers had conceived of, completely failed to occur. The Irish countryside did not rise. The Irish bourgeoisie, together with the upper, more influential stratum of the Irish intelligentsia, held aloof.' ('Lessons of the Dublin Events').

Trotsky stressed that the rising showed that national movements could only be carried through by the working class: 'The experiment of an Irish national rebellion, in which Casement represented, with undoubted personal courage, the outworn hopes and methods of the past, is over and done with. But the historical role of the Irish proletariat is only beginning.'

Since Trotsky was undoubtedly relying on second-hand capitalist press reports, the accuracy of this analysis is striking.

It seems clear that neither he nor Lenin realised, at the time, what Connolly's role had been. Nevertheless they both identified the part played by the working class.

'Questions of History' is wrong to suggest that Trotsky considered 'only pure working-class socialist revolution was of any importance.' The point is that he saw working-class socialist revolution as the ultimate means by which national and democratic struggles would be resolved — as did Lenin.

We have gone into this at length, not to be pedantic, but because Trotsky's remarks on the 1916 uprising have often been distorted and quoted selectively, by Stalinists, to prove that he ignored the national question. (See David Reed's book, and the CPI's 1970 introduction to the pamphlet 'Lenin on Ireland').

This distortion is answered by several of the early Comintern's principal congress resolutions, written by Trotsky, where the communist attitude to national self-determination is clearly spelled out. While on his death-bed, Lenin conflicted sharply with Stalin on the rights of small nations within the USSR: Trotsky supported Lenin. Trotsky's later writings repeated his views

many times, right up to the 'Manifesto on Imperialist War and Revolution' written in May 1940, five months before his death.

Like Lenin, Trotsky consistently stood for the right of nations to self-determination. Like Lenin, he saw imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. Like Lenin, he believed in temporary alliances with the national bourgeoisie in oppressed countries, only with the working class marching under its own banner towards a socialist goal.

What about Trotskyists today? 'Questions of History' states that they 'play down' the importance of national liberation.

But in 1969, the Trotskyists of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), were one of the few British organisations to oppose the Labour government sending British troops to Ireland.

Certainly, in the mid-70s, in line with the anti-Trotskyist degeneration of the Healy leadership, the SLL and then Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) succumbed to social-chauvinism in certain respects. The Trotskyist movement in Ireland was badly damaged and nearly destroyed. Then social-

chauvinist condemnations of 'terrorism' were published in our paper, in which the principle of support for the rights of nations oppressed by our own bourgeoisie were dropped. But since expelling Healy two years ago, we have fought to re-establish Trotskyist principles, and in the course of that to develop a correct attitude to national liberation.

At the same time Stalinist parties — be it the British CP or Communist Campaign Group, or the CP of Ireland — are condemning 'terrorism' ever more loudly. On the present anti-IRA witch-hunt — where the issue of defending national struggles comes up concretely — they are with imperialism. As for the Stalinist Workers' Party, they have long ago accepted partition lock, stock and barrel. It is these people, not Trotskyists, who turn their backs on Ireland's right to self-determination.

(A full documented account of the struggle among internationalists over the question of national self-determination is contained in 'Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International, 1907-1916', Monad Press 1984).

Connolly, Sinn Fein and Bolshevism

Why did the Easter uprising fail? What lessons can be learned from the work of James Connolly, who led it, and was punished with execu-

tion by British imperialism?

'Questions of History' points out that both Connolly and Jim Larkin — with whom he led Ireland's first mass strike

struggles, the 1907 Belfast dockers' strike and the 1913 Dublin general strike — 'had been strongly influenced by American Marxism in that it emphasised the role of the trade union in

a revolutionary movement, whereas Russian Marxism emphasised the role of the vanguard party' (p. 68).

To understand the significance of this, it is worth looking at the whole international socialist movement of

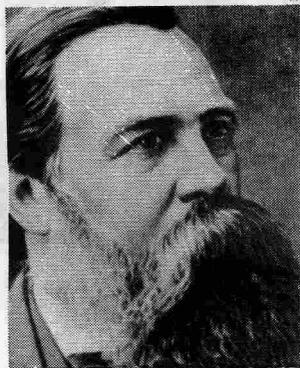
that time, the Second International.

This was formed in 1889 when Frederick Engels, one of the founders of Marxism, was still alive, and brought together all major socialist parties. Its history, broadly speaking, was of the struggle between two tendencies: reformists who advocated the gradual winning of reforms under capitalism, and were often prepared to enter coalition governments with capitalist parties (they had support from the most conservative sections of workers, the 'labour aristocracy'); and revolutionaries who were unequivocally for the overthrow of capitalism.

At the turn of the century, this struggle of tendencies took different forms in different countries. In the Second International's largest party, the German Social-Democrats, the reformists led by Eduard Bernstein had the upper hand against revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg; 'orthodox' Marxist theoreticians like Karl Kautsky wavered between these two opposites. German Social-Democracy embraced all 'socialists' from extreme right to extreme left, as did the French Socialist Party.

In Britain, there were various left socialist groups, who like the German left had no conception of organising a revolutionary party, and worked as part of the Labour Party after its formation in 1903.

In the US, there was no working-class electoral party at all. But the unions were clearly divided: between the pro-imperialist American Federation of Labour (AFL) led by Samuel Gompers, and the revolutionary syndicalist



Frederick Engels . . . the syndicalists ignored his writings on the state

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW: 'wobblies'), formed in 1905, who fought bitter battles to organise the mass of unskilled workers. It was this tendency with which Connolly worked in the US 1903-1910, before returning to Dublin to form the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI).

There was no country where the struggle between socialists were conducted



Delegates to the second Comintern congress at a Red Army parade: the Russian Bolsheviks fought during these congresses to bring the lessons of their history to the international movement

with such thoroughness, and at such a high theoretical level, as in Russia. The split of the first Russian Marxists from the revolutionary terrorist 'People's Will' group in 1883; the strike struggles of the 1890s; the building of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), formed in 1898 and split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903; the 1905 revolution which saw the world's first workers' councils (soviets) — these experiences, and the ability of revolutionaries to learn from them, produced the party which was able to lead the Russian revolution.



Eduard Bernstein . . . reformist leader of German Social-Democracy

In the pamphlet 'Left-Wing Communism', Lenin wrote of the 'decades of unprecedented suffering' through which the Bolsheviks had struggled to build Marxist leadership; in 1918 Trotsky wrote that the 'large staff of revolutionary leaders, tempered in struggle and bound together by the unity of the revolutionary socialist programme' was 'the priceless legacy' which

had come to the Russian working class alone from the epoch of the Second International. ('Lessons of the German Events').

The Bolsheviks and American syndicalists, then, both stood on the left wing of the movement. What were the roots of the crucial difference between Bolshevism, which saw the party as central, and syndicalism which placed all the emphasis on building unions?

The IWW's conception was that, through industrial unions (i.e. unions covering whole industries, as opposed to unions divided by trades),



Karl Kautsky . . . vacillated between left and right

the working class would gain control of the factories, and thus deprive capitalism of its economic power. The struggle for political power, the syndicalists believed, was subordinate to this economic struggle.

The syndicalists either ignored or opposed Engels' ideas about the state, as an instrument of power wielded by the ruling class in each society, which has to be forcibly overthrown by a new

class assuming power. (Of course this didn't stop them leading courageous struggles against state forces, nor, in Connolly's case, seeing the need to strike a blow at the British imperialist state during the first world war).

The unique conditions in Russia gave Marxists there the opportunity for a theoretical and practical training far advanced from that of socialists in the US.

During their internal struggles of the 1890s, and the struggle particularly by Lenin in 1898-9 to unite the scattered Marxist study circles into a nationally-centralised revolutionary party, they had already established the need for the working class to have first of all its own party which expressed its historical interests (i.e. the achievement of socialism) through its programme, and thereby guaranteed it political independence from other classes.

Consequently when a huge wave of strikes swept Russia in 1898-1900, and 'Economist' ideas were put forward amongst revolutionaries (i.e. that workers should concentrate mainly on economic struggles, as opposed to political ones against the state — thus echoing syndicalism in Russian conditions) these were firmly rejected by the Social-Democratic majority. Lenin and others insisted on the primacy of the political struggle, on the working class's role as a political force, and on its political independence from the bourgeoisie guaranteed by the revolutionary party.

This same question — of the revolutionary party and its programme ensuring the

political independence of the working class — was also central to the conflict with the Mensheviks. Although the immediate cause of the 1903 split with them was questions of party structure (Lenin advocated a centralised party whereas the Mensheviks wanted a loose federated organisation), there were fundamental political differences bound up with this. Lenin's organisational principles derived from his view of the working class as the leading force in the revolution; the Mensheviks saw the bourgeoisie as the leading force and consequently had no idea of a 'combat party' of workers. This issue was to put the Mensheviks on the other side of the barricades in October 1917.

(A full and readable account of this is 'The History of the Bolshevik Party' by G. Zinoviev).

The RSDLP split was one of the earliest clear expressions of the deep international division — between reformists who subordinated the workers' interests to those of the bourgeoisie, and revolutionaries who fought for the political independence of the working class in practice — which was consummated by a great historical event, the outbreak of the first world war in 1914. It was this which led Rosa Luxemburg to declare the Second International 'a rotten corpse' and Lenin to advocate a new International.

In their opposition to the

war, the Bolsheviks found themselves side-by-side with the German Spartacus League, the American revolutionary syndicalists, other left socialist parties, and heroic individual revolutionaries like Connolly and John Maclean who had undertaken a study of Marxism virtually single-handed.

'Did Connolly and Larkin fail to contribute as much to the development of a revolutionary situation by directing the bulk of their energy to union organisation as they might have done, had they addressed themselves to the task of building a vanguard party comprising scientifically trained revolutionar-

ies', asks 'Questions of History'.

What we have tried to show here is that — considering Connolly did not have the sort of Marxist training with which the Russian revolutionaries were advantaged — it is not a question of charging him with 'failing' to build a Bolshevik-type party, but rather of seeing why he was unable to do so. Given the limited theoretical tools provided by the syndicalist tradition (and also the limited number of Marx's works available in English at the time), and his lack of knowledge of the internal life of Russian and German socialism, Connolly's insistence on the leading role of the working class (in substance the same as all revolutionary socialists) was a great contribution.

Conditions for the rapid and successful construction of the Third Communist International (Comintern) — and thereby for the systematic and widespread study of the lessons of the Russian Bolsheviks' experience — only came after Connolly's death, that is, after the victory of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

Most of the revolutionary socialists joined the Comintern when it was founded in March 1919, and were able to participate in its first four Congresses, in which the Bolsheviks brought their experience into the international movement; this included, for example, many former



The revolutionary syndicalists of the International Workers of the World, who unionised these American miners, believed that the economic struggle could bring socialism about



Eamonn De Valera reviewing IRA troops in July 1921: his bourgeois government had the uncritical support of Irish Labour leaders

IWW leaders, and in Ireland Connolly's son Roddy. Perhaps Connolly would have joined it too, had he lived.

The Comintern gave revolutionaries internationally the opportunity to learn from the Russian experience, only those who rejected revolutionary politics deliberately rejected these lessons.

Such was the case with those who assumed leadership of the SPI after Connolly's death — principally Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) secretary William O'Brien, Irish TUC leader Thomas Johnson, and Cathal O'Shannon.

They acclaimed the Bolshevik revolution, as did many who wanted to maintain 'left' credentials — but were bitterly hostile to the essence of Bolshevism, the building of revolutionary leadership through which the political independence of the working class was guaranteed.

'Questions of History' states correctly that, in Ireland, 'not only did organised labour allow the bourgeoisie to monopolise effective control of the struggle for national liberation, but they also allowed the bourgeoisie to gag it. While O'Brien and labour did support the anti-conscription general strike of 1918, they did so on a purely nationalist platform allowing Sinn Fein to gain the rewards. In the same year O'Brien orchestrated the refusal of labour to participate in the 1918 elections . . . Larkin, however, who was in America, felt that by their action in 1918 they had surrendered to the "anti-labour Sinn Fein" and by doing so had turned their backs on the chance Connolly had given them to lead the national struggle' (p. 77).

And when the authors ask — 'did the absence of a revolutionary vanguard party contribute to a significant degree to the development of opportunism in the labour movement, and the subsequent deviation by that movement from the ideology of Connolly?' — we would answer 'yes'.

The SPI leaders' relationship with the First Dail (1919-20) was proof of how dangerous that opportunism was.

The British general election of December 1918, mentioned above, resulted in a landslide victory for Sinn Fein in Ireland: it won 73 seats, the Nationalists won 6 and the Unionists 27. On this basis, Sinn Fein assembled the First Dail and declared it a continuation of the 1916

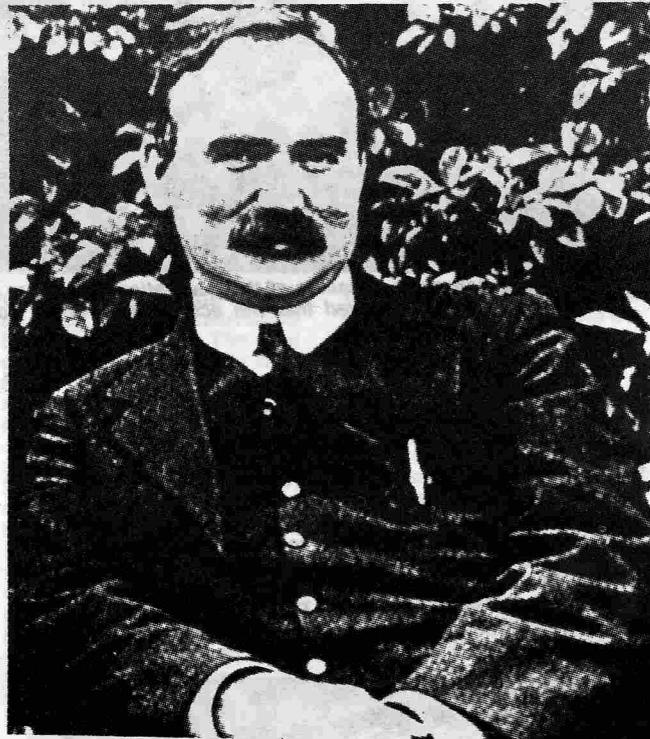
Republic, in reply to which British imperialism intervened militarily in the Tan War (1919-20).

What was the relationship of the SPI to the Sinn Fein government whose class character was unmistakably bourgeois?

The 'Democratic Programme' adopted by the Dail — a masterpiece of radical phrases designed to push the working class into supporting a capitalist government — was drawn up by Dail president Sean O'Ceallaigh

called for "improvements in the conditions under which the working class live and labour". And in any case "the "Democratic Programme" was buried because the conservatives who ruled Sinn Fein wanted to maintain good relations with the Catholic Church, conservative farmers and businessmen.'

The SPI leaders' support for Sinn Fein leader Eamonn De Valera was uncritical, indeed they helped give his bourgeois government a 'left' face, with which it



'The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be discovered.'

James Connolly (1868-1916)

advised by Johnson and O'Brien.

This programme stated, following Padraig Pearse's formulation in 1916, that 'the nation's sovereignty extends not only to all men and women of the nation, but to all its material possessions, the nation's soil and all its resources, all the wealth and the wealth-producing processes within the nation', and that 'all rights in private property must be subordinate to the public right and welfare'.

As 'Questions of History' explains (pp 78-9), 'although the "Democratic Programme" was radical in content it did not exhort the elimination of class society or advocate workers' control, it only

hoped to win political support from Ireland's restless working class. This was opposite from a Bolshevik, communist policy — which would have been to fight alongside that government, to the death, against British imperialism, but refuse to give it political confidence or (worse still) 'socialist' credentials. (Such an attitude was adopted by the Bolsheviks themselves, when they fought alongside Kerensky's government to defeat Kornilov in September 1917).

On February 3, 1919, a week after the Dail assembled, O'Shannon and Johnson went not to the leaders of the Comintern, but to the 'International Labour and Socialist Conference' at

Berne, to appeal for support for the Irish Republic. No-one could criticise, of course, an appeal for backing against Britain's imperialist threat — but note that this conference was called by the pro-imperialist British Labour Party, to assemble those right-wing 'socialists' who supported the first world war slaughter and opposed the Russian revolution.

In September 1919, British prime minister Lloyd George declared the First Dail illegal and the war with Britain intensified. By mid-1920, a three-day general strike had won the release of political prisoners, the Knocklong creamery soviet was established and had triggered a movement of similar co-operatives, and the ITGWU had declared a 'black' on the movement of British military supplies and men. The working class and rural poor came to the fore in the struggle against Britain — and De Valera turned against that working-class movement, firstly with the Land Arbitration Courts which prevented land takeovers by peasants and supported the landlords. These courts were supported by O'Brien and Johnson.

When the Irish bourgeois leaders signed the Treaty with Britain in December 1921, O'Brien and co. accepted its terms, and called for reconciliation between pro- and anti-Treaty Republicans.

But one positive development took place: O'Brien, O'Shannon and Johnson were expelled from the SPI, the leadership was taken by James Connolly's son Roddy who attended the Second and Third Congresses of the Comintern in Moscow, a revolutionary socialist programme was adopted, and the party's name changed to 'Communist'.

There are vital lessons to be learned from the 1916-23 period — above all from the struggles of the group around Roddy Connolly, who tried, in opposition to O'Brien and co., to give independent working-class leadership.

What about the prospects for building revolutionary leadership today?

'Questions of History' asks: 'If Sinn Fein today were to refrain from becoming a revolutionary vanguard party with a strong socialist content, which placed great emphasis on ideologically training its members, and required that they have a high level of awareness, could they be depriving the nationalist working class of Ireland of some,

or much, of its capacity to complete the struggle?' (p. 97).

The Bolshevik conception of a revolutionary vanguard party, as we tried to show above, is one which, by pursuing a consistent struggle for a socialist programme, guarantees the political independence of the working class against all other classes. The history of the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals is the history of struggles to build such parties, in conflict with tendencies which denied or played down the leading role of the working class in the socialist revolution internationally, or sought to water down the socialist programme.

Those seeking to build a revolutionary party in Ireland or any country, would have to look first of all to that history, and fight to assimilate its lessons.

Sinn Fein comes from a different tradition — that of those courageous Fenians who took up the gun against British imperialist domination, waging rural guerrilla warfare a century before Che Guevara.

The Republican movement today has the honour of being the only significant force to resist British imperialist occupation of northern Ireland — and does so militarily, with the consequent loss of many heroic fighters. More than any other national liberation movement, it draws its support and membership from sections of the working class. We don't forget any of this.

In judging their political programme, however, we will not blur our differences: theirs is the programme of Irish nationalism, and reformism — not of revolutionary socialism.

Certainly Sinn Fein leaders speak about socialism. But what do they mean by it? Gerry Adams writes that Ireland 'must win not only political freedom but economic independence as well' ('Politics of Irish Freedom', p. 167). This economic independence 'must be in the sense of securing our own control over our own economic surplus, so that we can apply it to productive capital investment for the planned economic development of the whole island and of all our people. This means the reconquest of Ireland by the Irish people.

'This can not be done under the present system. It means national independence and a social revolution in all Ireland.'

Although Adams refers to 'social revolution', he leaves its meaning vague. When he says 'productive capital investment for the planned economic development of



Connolly towering above bourgeois politicians of his time (from a British Communist Party pamphlet of 1921)

the whole island' — this is much clearer; it means, the growth of the Irish capitalist economy 'independent' of British and other imperialist domination. This is also clear from Sinn Fein's 1987 election programmes, for both twenty-six county and six-county elections, which again speak of 'productive investment', public spending increases and other radical reforms ... but not of such policies as nationalisation of

banks or major industries which are basic to a revolutionary socialist programme.

There are no grounds for believing the Republican movement can become a revolutionary party of the Bolshevik type, any more today than in the past. This is not to minimise its tremendous capacity to fight — and lay down lives — in the struggle against British occupation.

What is more, the very

appearance of 'Questions of History', its attention to socialist history and the issues it raises, shows the huge positive value of the discussion taking place in the Republican movement, and particularly in the prisons. It is obligatory reading for serious socialists in Ireland and Britain. We hope these articles have added something to the discussion, and welcome contributions to 'Workers Press' on these issues.

LETTERS

From "Workers Press", June 11, 1988

Workers Press carried a series of articles during December and January, about the political discussion taking place among Irish Republican prisoners of war in the British imperialist jails. This included three articles by Simon Pirani, reviewing the book 'Questions of History' which was written by Irish political prisoners and published by Sinn Fein.

In May, during the period when Workers Press stopped publication, we received a letter from a Republican prisoner, taking up some of the points in these articles. We thank the comrade for the letter, and publish it at this first opportunity, inviting further discussion from readers.

Longkesh

IT WAS with profound interest that I read your series of reviews on the book 'Questions of History'. To my mind it reflected a clear willingness on the part of the Workers Revolutionary Party leadership to consider Republican ideas and to facilitate the spread of such ideas. Nevertheless, I do feel that despite the extensive coverage given to the book by Simon Pirani, the response via the letters column was virtually non-existent. This has led to fears on the part of some Republicans that WRP grass-roots activists view Ireland as if it was situated in the Caribbean — America's problem, not Britain's.

As to the review itself, Mr Pirani must be complimented on the amount of work he put into the project, and on his background knowledge which is clearly admirable. At the same time I feel there are a number of points raised by Simon Pirani which merit further comment and exploration.

In his first article (Workers Press number 105) Simon Pirani takes the line that imperialism and unionism are in 'mortal crisis', and because of this he argues that the protestant working class will be forced 'into united struggles against their will and expectations'. As such he feels Reed's view (1) that the working class (protestant and catholic) in the north cannot be united until imperialism is defeated, must be rejected. The problem with this view however, is that it reduces sectarianism to a simple combination of state manipulation and the existence of a labour aristocracy. This overlooks the relatively autonomous phenomenon of 'popular sectarianism', so usefully described by Munck and Rolston in their book 'Belfast in the thirties: an oral history'.

'Questions of History' admittedly does not give enough considera-

tion to popular sectarianism but the subject has not been entirely overlooked (see for example page 101 'Questions of History'). While it is true that David Reed does open the door to a 'stage-ist' interpretation, the general thrust of 'Questions of History' and subsequent work as yet unpublished, has been to reject stage-ism while generally accepting Reed's argument. There has been a history of independent working class activity on the part of protestants but this has never at any time reduced, let alone negated, their sense of Orangeism. There is no evidence to suggest that imperialist and unionist decline will produce any different effects. And if it did produce different effects, Republicans would welcome it — our task would be made that much easier.

In his third article (Workers Press number 107) Simon Pirani expresses the opinion that 'there are no grounds for believing that the Republican movement can become a revolutionary party of a Bolshevik type...'. Firstly this presupposes the need for such a party in modern conditions and, secondly, it views Republicanism as being in a historical trap out of which it cannot break free.

In relation to the first point, it may well be so that a Bolshevik-type party is required, but it seems to me that the left in general, and the Republican left in particular, treat the issue of vanguard parties without due regard to historical and geographical specificity. The concept is presented as if it were a given truth — as if it possessed a timeless, ahistorical and universal logic. How Marxian is such an approach? It would seem to me that Marxists, when advocating the need for a revolutionary party

of a Bolshevik type, will need to do so in terms of what its purpose is in the present day rather than to attempt to transplant its usefulness in one context across time and space to what may be a totally different context. It is no longer good enough for the left in the Western world to explain away their marginalisation in terms of reformism, Stalinism, false consciousness etc. The inability of the left to persuade others of their right to serve as a vanguard party is a factor of tremendous importance.

As for Republicanism being in a historical trap, apart from the mechanistic nature of this belief, it also overlooks significant developments within Republicanism. The move from tradition to modernity expressed at the 1986 Ard Fheis (2) was undoubtedly a much more difficult move to make, than from radical nationalism to revolutionary socialism. The Republican movement may never take such a step and indeed this would be regrettable and self-defeating, but to predict in a mechanistic fashion is, in my opinion, not the best means of applying Marxist knowledge.

A Republican prisoner.

(1) This refers to David Reed of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), whose book 'Ireland: the key to the British Revolution' takes the line that British imperialism has to be defeated in Ireland before the working class there can be united. This is referred to in 'Questions of History'. Simon Pirani's article attacked this position of Reed's.

(2) This was the Ard Fheis which — in opposition to a group led by Ruari O'Bradaigh who walked out to form Republican Sinn Fein — changed the movement's policy of refusing to take seats in the twenty-six county parliament at Leinster House. Sinn Fein candidates if elected to Leinster House will now take their seats, but a policy of abstention from the British parliament at Westminster remains.

From "Workers Press", June 25, 1988

WITH regard to the letter from the republican prisoner, I would first like to say that WRP members are not indifferent to the 'Irish question'. This issue has resulted in much discussion and active solidarity work for the past two-and-a-half years — something which was unheard of before 1985 under Healy.

The lack of response to Simon Pirani's article should not be seen as indifference, but rather a reflection of most members' ignorance and confusion regarding this all-important question for British socialists.

After many years of mis-leadership by Healy — whose legacy this ignorance is — the WRP has had two-and-a-half years of often fierce and bitter internal struggle. But we are now able to concentrate on this and other important issues.

Developing a Marxist perspective

and analysing how the struggle against imperialism in Ireland and the struggle for a United Socialist Republic can be successfully concluded has only just begun. This work will be developed with all those involved in the struggle against imperialism in Ireland who see the need for a vanguard party and Marxist leadership.

The need for such a party is crucial if the struggle for socialism is not to be defeated. The Stalinists of the Workers Party, the Communist Party of Ireland the Labour Party and the SDLP are not in the business of leading a socialist revolution, while Gerry Adams MP, president of Sinn Fein, says that socialism is not on the agenda at present in the struggle against imperialism.

Ever since the 1920's revolution in China, Stalinism has consistently bet-

rayed the working class and every anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle (Spain, Germany, Greece and Chile to name but a few). Gorbachev's recent talks with Reagan were concerned with maintaining Stalinism's counter-revolutionary alliance with imperialism, betraying millions of oppressed peoples throughout the world, in Ireland, South Africa, El Salvador and elsewhere.

When Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938, he said that the crisis of humanity was the crisis of working class leadership. This is more true today than ever before and is particularly relevant to what is happening in Ireland.

The struggle against imperialism in Ireland will only be victorious if it is joined with the struggle for socialism now. I believe that Marxists in Ireland must renew Connolly's slogan: 'The cause of Ireland is the cause of labour, and the cause of labour is the cause of Ireland' and develop a programme in which the struggle of the working class is united with the struggle for national unity being waged by the republican movement.

Sectarianism does present formidable obstacles for those who seek to build unity between Catholic and Protestant workers in the six-

counties. Protestant workers still have marginal interests: 'privileges' like jobs and houses which are denied to thousands of Catholics. This results in anti-Catholic ideology, aided and abetted by British imperialism and a bigoted loyalist state.

This sectarianism has been ignored, with only one or two exceptions, by the trade union bureaucracy in Ireland. It seems that their interests lie in maintaining the status-quo and, consequently, a religiously divided working class.

Similarly the British trade union and Labour Party leaders have consistently supported imperialism in its occupation and partition of Ireland. Like their counterparts in Ireland they are more interested in preserving their own interests than supporting Irish unity.

There can be no basis for working class unity in the North without an all-out struggle against sectarianism; those fighting for a vanguard party in Ireland must fight these bureaucrats on this crucial issue.

I agree with Simon that imperialism and loyalism are in crisis. However this crisis must go far deeper before it has any real impact on the thinking of protestant workers and on how they see their future interests in relation to British involvement in Ireland.

In this respect, the struggle being waged by the IRA against imperialism can only deepen this crisis further.

Through the Anglo-Irish agreement, now adhered to wholeheartedly by Haughey and his Fianna Fail government, the southern bourgeoisie is more than ever collaborating with British imperialism.

Imperialism does not rely solely on the orange card to maintain its power and control in Ireland. In fact loyalist hegemony in the North on its own is insufficient to imperialist needs. I would say that the southern bourgeoisie is the most crucial component to the future plans of British imperialism in Ireland.

Irish Marxists and socialists must point out all these developments to the working class and youth in both the North and South. Their only future under imperialism and capitalism is oppression, unemployment, emigration and poverty. The struggle for national unity is the struggle for socialism — this means a struggle to smash the orange state in the North and the green Tory state in the South.

This letter does not pretend to have the last word on these all-important questions for British socialists. But let the discussion begin.

Charlie Walsh
West London WRP

From "Workers Press", July 2, 1988

I would like to add to what Charlie Walsh said, in reply to the letter from a Republican prisoner (Workers Press 11 June 88).

Is a Bolshevik-type party necessary? 'The concept is presented as if it were a given truth — as if it possessed a timeless, ahistorical and universal logic', writes the Republican prisoner.

For Marxism, truths are 'given' by historical experience. In my review of 'Questions of History', I wrote about the historical reasons why a Bolshevik party was developed by Lenin, but not by other great internationalists (Connolly, John MacLean, the German Spartacists, the American 'Wobblies' etc.).

Only in Russia, where a Bolshevik party was built, did the post-war revolutionary wave bring victory, and in the early years of the Communist International (Comintern), the Bolshevik leaders fought to educate the world communist movement in the lessons of their own experience. In 'Left Wing Communism' Lenin wrote about 'the truly iron discipline' which was Bolshevism, that realised the proletarian dictatorship and prosecuted 'the most ruthless war waged by the new class against the more powerful enemy, against the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased tenfold by its overthrow...'

The class struggle today is still that 'most ruthless war', and will be, until the working class vanquishes capitalism in its main international centres; from this — which is very concrete and not at all 'ahistorical' or 'timeless' — the need for Bolshevik parties arises.

Lenin's conception of Bolshevism was of a revolutionary party built on the basis of Marxist theory; he established in the struggle against 'spontaneism' (1901-

1902) that such theory developed, not simply out of the struggles of the working class, but as a scientific world outlook, standing on the shoulders of all previous developments of philosophy, political economy and socialist thinking; this theory was 'brought into the working class from without'.

What happened to this conception — of revolutionary self-discipline based on scientific ideas — fought for in the Comintern's early years? It was overthrown in the Comintern by Stalinism during the 1920s; those Bolshevik-Leninists who continued the fight for it, in the Trotskyist International Left Opposition, faced physical repression by Stalinism.

(Stalinist 'discipline' — mindless acceptance of dictates from above — is the opposite of Bolshevik discipline; Stalinist talk of 'vanguard parties', divorced from the Marxist foundations of Bolshevism, is the opposite of our conception).

In my review I wrote 'there are no grounds for believing that the Republican movement can become a revolutionary party of the Bolshevik type'; the Republican prisoner wrote that this approach 'views Republicanism as being in a historical trap out of which it cannot break free'.

Put it this way: the whole of mankind is in a historical trap; we have computers, space flight... and mass starvation; the fate of humanity depends on the working class struggle to overthrow capitalism, and that in turn depends on the conscious struggle to build Bolshevik leadership. The very fact that Republican prisoners have become convinced of the need to study Marxism, and to discuss with us in the Workers Press about it, is proof that they are far from being in an 'historical trap'.

Like the working class in general, they are impelled towards finding answers to the questions posed by their struggle. But Republicanism as an ideology is in an historical trap: its aim, a united Ireland, cannot be achieved with the 'stage-ist' ideology which guides the Republican movement's leadership.

There have been revolutionary guerilla-ists, who systematically broke with their former ideology and became Marxists: the greatest example was Plekhanov, founder of Russian Marxism. On the other hand, hideous Stalinist perversions of 'Marxism' have sometimes been injected into petty-bourgeois nationalist movements (for example, Official Sinn Fein in the early 1970s).

But no petty-bourgeois nationalist movement, not even one with a working-class following, ever turned itself into a Bolshevik party based on Marxist science.

In fact, predictions by 'Marxist' revisionists, that one might substitute for a Bolshevik party, has more than once (Stalin's illusions in the 'left' Kuomintang in 1926, Pablo's faith in the 'progressive' wing of the Bolivian National Revolutionary Movement in 1952) led to disaster for the working class, including many courageous fighters who remain under the banner of nationalism. My point about Sinn Fein was not a 'mechanistic prediction', but based on what I know about these historical experiences.

Nowhere will we find more courageous fighters against imperialism than in Ireland. To you, comrades, we in the WRP promise frank discussion; to the social-chauvinist Labour leaders, we promise relentless battle to drive them out of the British worker's movement, which they have shamed with a century of bootlicking pro-imperialism.

Simon Pirani

WHAT WE SAID ABOUT THE STRUGGLE AGAINST BRITISH OCCUPATION

Stand firm against anti-IRA witch-hunt

This article appeared in "Workers Press" on November 14 last year, immediately after the Enniskillen explosion.

THE Thatcher government and its state forces are considering a new and bloody offensive against Irish nationalists, following the Enniskillen explosion.

● The re-introduction of 'preventive detention' — internment without trial — was being kept 'under review', Tory Northern Ireland Secretary Tom King told howling Ulster Unionist reactionaries in parliament.

● Unionist sources told British newspaper reporters that, at a private meeting, premier Thatcher had hinted that laws may be introduced abolishing the right of silence for 'suspected terrorists'.

● The Tories are also considering further legal restrictions against Sinn Fein.

● Collaborating closely with British imperialism in this new anti-Republican offensive is the 26-county government. Sir John Hermon, head of the reactionary and sectarian Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), is discussing the clampdown first of all with top officers of the 26-county Garda.

● As the state clampdown began, so did a renewal of violence by loyalist para-militaries — who are tacitly encouraged, and sometimes armed by, British imperialism. A 19-year-old Catholic landscape gardener was killed in west Belfast and five Catholics injured by machine-gun fire in north Belfast.

Joining in the outburst of anti-Republican venom in parliament this week were front-bench Labour spokesmen, whose acquiescence and support will be essential in the coming onslaught. The Labour Party's Home Policy Committee passed a resolution re-affirming 'our opposition to the Sinn Fein strategy of "bullet and ballot" which is no more than a cynical and dishonest attempt to legitimise terrorist actions such as that at Enniskillen.'

Every socialist and trades unionist must stand firm against this sickening outburst of hypocrisy, and redouble our efforts in support of the Irish working class against British imperialism.

FIRSTLY, the deliberate lie that Enniskillen was a 'terrorist action' by the IRA — repeated again and again by Tory and Labour politicians alike — must be nailed. The full IRA statement released through the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau said:

‘The IRA admits responsibility for planting the bomb in Enniskillen yesterday which exploded with such catastrophic consequences. We deeply regret what occurred. GHQ has now established that one of our units placed a remote control bomb in St Mary's, aimed at catching crown forces personnel on patrol in connection with Remembrance Day services, but not during it. The bomb blew up without being triggered by our radio signal.

There has been an ongoing battle for supremacy between the IRA and British Army electronic engineers over the use of remote-control bombs. In the past, some of our landmines have been triggered by the British Army scanning high frequencies, and other devices have been jammed and neutralised. On each occasion we overcame the problem and recently believed that we were in advance of British counter-measures.

In the present climate nothing we can say in explanation will be given the attention that the truth deserves, nor will it compensate the feelings of the injured or bereaved. ●

The truth of this statement can be judged by the recent course of IRA military strategy, which has been directed first of all against military and RUC personnel in the six counties. A recent two-year bomb and rocket campaign, against police stations, was supplemented by attacks on civilians doing supply or building work for such installations. The policy of individual executions of informers, and high-ranking state or government personnel, have continued.

At no time has the IRA had a policy of killing civilians at Enniskillen or anywhere else. A recent IRA statement pointed out they had cancelled more operations than they had gone ahead with, in attempting to lessen civilian casualties.

SECONDLY, we must condemn the miserable hypocrisy expressed over Enniskillen by capitalist politicians, and their aides in press and churches. This fitted in well with the crocodile tears they shed every Remembrance Day for the victims of two imperialist wars generated by the system they represent. Just as they mourn the war dead — remaining silent about the US-British holocaust against Dresden, Hamburg, Hiroshima and Nagasaki — so they condemn the IRA, while upholding the blood-soaked occupation of Ireland's six counties with its civilian deaths and misery, not to mention the centuries of previous colonial oppression.



Labour leaders are imperialism's most slavish supporters

Foremost among the anti-'terrorist' witch-hunters are the pro-imperialist Labour leaders and Communist Party Stalinists. The 'Morning Star' began its cowardly condemnations of the IRA on Monday, without even waiting to find out the truth about the Enniskillen bomb.

'Whatever the cause, the "Morning Star" expresses its total condemnation of this murderous act of violence,' said this organ of the pro-Moscow wing of British Stalinism.

First off the mark to denounce the IRA, before any of the details were known, was the Soviet news agency, TASS.

Following the Enniskillen bomb, socialists and trades unionists must stand firm against the witch-hunt.

As Trotskyists, the Workers Revolutionary Party has fundamental differences with the Republican movement, particularly with their leaders' 'two-stage' conception of the struggle against imperialism. We shall discuss these issues at length in Workers Press. But following Enniskillen, we underline that we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Irish working class, the Irish community in Britain, and the Republican movement itself, which faces a massive state witch-hunt. We condemn the sickening hypocrisy of the Labour-ites and Stalinists, who go whining about 'terrorism' to their Tory masters — who are the only terrorists in Ireland.

Down with British imperialism's witch-hunt and all those who support it!

They need this 'justice'

This article appeared in "Workers Press" on Saturday, February 6 this year, just after the Birmingham Six appeal was turned down

THE RAW nerve, touched by the Tory decision not to prosecute police who operated the 'shoot-to-kill' policy, was wrenched out by the roots when the Birmingham Six appeal was rejected.

After the Appeal Court judgement, both Tory and Labour MPs pleaded with Home Secretary Douglas Hurd to grant the six men a royal pardon, i.e., to free them with all awkward questions left unanswered.

Hurd could not do it — because to free the six would be an admission that the police were vicious thugs who beat confessions out of them and that the original trial was a blatant state-organised frame-up. To free the six would undermine the Prevention of Terrorism Act; it would weaken, however slightly, the intimidatory threat of instantaneous deportation or imprisonment on trumped-up charges facing every Irish person in Britain who becomes politically active. It would undermine their lordships' point that because the Birmingham Six mixed with Republicans, their guilt was virtually proven.

'This is a black day for British justice', cried labour MP Chris Mullin. (The racist fanatics of 'The Sun' said Mullin's statement was 'worthy of a Falls Road Fenian', and that the six should probably have been 'strung up' long ago).

Mullin's tireless efforts to expose the frame-up must be praised. But his naivete about 'British justice' is pathetic. The judgement paraded that capitalist 'justice' in all its pomp and circumstance.

What else does 'British justice' mean, if not the punishment of the Irish people for the 'crime' of fighting to rid themselves from imperialist rule? What else does it mean than the jailing of innocent workers, in order to terrify others into submission?



The 'shoot-to-kill' controversy underlines the same point. John Stalker, too, saw an infringement of 'British justice' — in the assassinations organised by the MI5 and the RUC. This was no infringement, but a central plank of British policy — and when the RUC got caught, it was continued by the army, with the killing of two IRA volunteers at Derry in December 1984, three in Strabane in January 1985 and eight at Loughgall in April 1987.

There is deep unease in the ruling class about the ramshackle regime of terror in the north of Ireland. So much so that Stalker's memoirs are being serialised by the 'Daily Express' — who are certainly more bothered about increasing their circulation than about noble liberal principles, but who no doubt sense the disquiet of their middle-class readers at the RUC's Guatemalan-death-squad style.

Imagine the eyebrows raised in Surbiton, when they read that Sir John Hermon, entertaining a visiting Deputy Chief Constable (no less!), showed him details of his mother's catholic family background written on the back of a cigarette packet!

But Surbiton needs the killing fields of Armagh; Whitehall needs the torture

chambers at Castlereagh barracks; Thatcher's 'people's capitalism' needs the blood-soaked military occupation of the six counties — to try and stifle working-class and nationalist struggles which threaten to strike powerful blows at the British capitalist state.

Labour and trades union leaders who prattle on about Thatcher's 'share-owning democracy' (Norman Willis was doing this again last week), always try to ignore this gory brutality on which it depends. We have to adapt to it, they say, and recognise the 'new reality'. How nice, if we could only have it without the nasty bits.

The 'shoot-to-kill' and Birmingham Six decisions showed that the 'nasty bits' are essential to capitalism. That is why every time the Labour leaders come to power, dedicated to preserving capitalism, they have to preserve the bloody occupation of the six counties and everything that goes with it.

It was the last Labour government that introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The one before sent troops to Ireland in the first place. They carried on with the torture and murder where the Tories left off.

The British working class must drive these leaders from its ranks. Its own interests can only be served by joining together with the Irish people in the struggle against Thatcher — as Sinn Fein councillor Mitchell McLaughlin correctly pointed out at last week's 'Bloody Sunday' rally. This means British workers standing unequivocally for British withdrawal, and Irish self-determination.

A central part of this fight must be the organisation of a labour movement enquiry into the activities of the MI5, MI6 and RUC in the north of Ireland — which, in the mid-70s, assumed the dual purpose of 'destabilising' a Labour government and attempting to smash the IRA.

Some comrades fear that such an enquiry would be a fruitless exercise, which would only tell us what we already know about British imperialist violence. But the organised working class movement must take up these questions, as a movement. Enquiring in to the workings of the state is essential, if we are to fight it and the pro-imperialist Labour leaders who defend it.

- **Defeat British Imperialism**
- **For a Socialist United Ireland**
- **Build Trotskyist leadership**

The struggle of the last 18 years in the north of Ireland has been fought around nationalist issues and under nationalist leadership; but objectively it is part of the struggle of the international working class for socialism. More than ever, the Irish working class requires a revolutionary leadership that bases itself on this essential connection.

The struggles of the Irish working class, and moreover the struggles under the banner of nationalism, represent a terrible threat to Britain: a qualitatively greater danger than was posed by national struggles in India or Britain's African colonies - because the advanced stage of the world capitalist crisis, and because of the numerical strength of the Irish working class, its readiness to fight...and its geographical proximity to Britain is British imperialism's Achilles' heel.

The decline of British imperialism and the six-county state

British imperialism has been transformed since the Fenians fought it, and even since it partitioned Ireland in 1922. Weakened by the growth of other imperialist powers, and by working-class and national liberation struggles in its colonies and former colonies, it is today a poor cousin of US imperialism.

Before 1922, British imperialism had only one really reliable ally in Ireland, the northern Orange bourgeoisie. The very moment at which that bourgeoisie was given its "own" six-county statelet, in 1922, partition also marked the total and blood-soaked betrayal of the national struggle by the southern Irish bourgeoisie - with whom British capital has tried to develop an ever-closer working relationship, expressed politically today in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the proposed Extradition laws. Thus the relative importance of the northern Orange bourgeoisie to imperialism has declined, giving rise to jealousy and friction.

From the start of Ireland's capitalist development, industries developed in Belfast - principally, shipping and linen - at the expense of the rest of Ireland, formed the basis of the protestant workers' privilege and protestant working-class support for loyalism. In the 1960s and 1970s these declined, along with British traditional industries, and today have nearly disappeared. (Harland and Wolff shipyard employed 21,000 in the 1920s, 10,000 in 1970 and 2,000 today; it has been saved from extinction only by the favours deliberately granted it by the British state.) Even the more modern British-owned firms, brought in to replace older industries, have declined rapidly in recent years.

A striking feature of the six-county economy is that the largest employer, by far, is the state. Public service employment, surely the highest in western Europe, is a staggering 36 per cent of the total. (This 36 per cent, added to the 21 per cent which are unemployed, actually means a majority of the workforce are financially dependent on the state.)

This bloated apparatus pervades every sector of the economy; it also includes the 8,000-strong Ulster Defence Regiment and the 12,000-strong RUC, through which a large section of the protestant population are mobilised in defence of their own privileges; the barriers between these forces and the loyalist para-militaries and pogromist gangs are of course completely blurred.

Paying for this massive repressive machine, along with the cost of an occupying army of 10,000 and war damage, is an enormous burden on the British state.

The six-county state was established by British

imperialism and the Ulster industrialists, with loyalism and sectarianism as their political tools. Now, with British imperialism in disastrous decline, the industries which were the basis for that state have virtually gone.

The present crisis of Unionism - the split between the ultraloyalists and the devolutionists - is thus an expression of the crisis of the six-county state itself and of British imperialism. In 1969, these contradictions of the rotten six-county statelet gave rise to bitter struggles over unemployment, housing and religious discrimination; these rapidly exposed the statelet's bankruptcy and untenability; in turn that fuelled the struggle waged under a nationalist banner. All the factors which sparked the conflict are present far more strongly today. Unemployment is three times what it was then. What about the protestant workers? Living not in imperialist Britain but in a privileged corner of colonial Ireland, they had not only the privileges of what Marx, Engels and Lenin called 'the labour aristocracy', but also a political connection with the protestant ruling class and British imperialism, cemented by religious sectarianism.

We have no illusions about the fearsome problem posed by loyalism. But neither are we mesmerised by its strength, which is only as great as that of its master, imperialism.

Just as the shattering crisis of imperialism is throwing British workers who in the past were 'privileged' (the printers, civil servants etc) into struggle, so it is having a profound impact on protestant workers - whose jobs, the very basis for their privilege, are disappearing. We are absolutely confident that in revolutionary struggles, the best and most class-conscious sections of them will prove to be the most valiant fighters.

Why Britain stays in Ireland

The partition of Ireland in 1921-1922 was the only practical means for both British imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie, to ensure the subjugation of the working class and the continuation of capitalist rule.

Working-class and small farmers' action during the independence war of 1919-1920 - general strikes, the establishment of soviets, land seizures in rural areas - presented a threat not only to British imperialism, but to all the Irish bourgeois leaders, both the right-wingers (Griffith) and the 'left' nationalists (De Valera).

Partition, cemented in the six counties with the mobilisation of loyalist and sectarian pogroms, and in the south by right-wing bourgeois nationalism, satisfied both British imperialism and the southern bourgeoisie. It brought the division of the working class, continuation of capitalist rule north and south, economic domination over Ireland as a whole, and prospects of future exploitation by imperialist finance capital.

It is not the immediate economic benefits from the declining industries in the six counties - which are negligible - that explains the need for the continuation of partition and the six-county state. There are much wider considerations, for London, Dublin, and imperialism in general. The over-riding fear is of working-class revolt in a European country - inevitably a central feature of the struggle against partition, and equally a nightmare for imperialism. Even 'voluntary' withdrawal by Britain from its oldest colony would have such profound and far-reaching consequences, above all in terms of provoking new working-class struggles, that imperialism dares not consider it.

That is why Ireland cannot be united by political and military pressure on the British state (that is the strategy of the Republican leaders) - but only by revolutionary working-class struggles which aim to establish workers' power and appropriate capitalism.

The twenty-six county state

The bourgeoisie in the twenty-six counties, although 'freed' in 1922 to continue its own capitalist development outside British political control, remained economically and politically hampered by partition. Without the industrialised six counties, the southern state remained in the 1930s a source of cheap food, military recruits and immigrant workers, and an outlet for British manufactured goods. De Valera's attempts to use protectionist measures to make the twenty-six county state 'self-sufficient' failed.

The growth of the twenty-six county economy since the second world war, and especially towards the tail-end of the boom in the 1970s, was part of an international development in which finance capital looked for new areas of exploitation where there were supplies of cheap labour and high levels of productivity. As the economies of Brazil, South Korea and Taiwan grew, for example, so did that of the twenty-six counties.

Especially since the twenty-six county state joined the EEC in 1973, foreign capital, particularly American, flowed in on a large scale. (Between 1970 and 1981, the average per annum growth rate in industrial production was 4.3 per cent as compared with a 1.9 per cent average in the EEC; hightech capital-intensive industries which accounted for 11 per cent of gross output and 9 per cent of the workforce in 1966 increased to 52 per cent of gross output and 42 per cent of the workforce ten years later. The expansion continued in the late 1970s: 800 foreign firms arrived between 1975 and 1981; between 1977 and 1980 the average return on US investment in the twenty-six counties was 33.7 per cent, twice the European average; employment in foreign-owned industries increased from 58,000 in 1973 to 80,000 in 1980.)

Today, 31 per cent of employment in the twenty-six counties is provided by foreign firms, nearly half of that by US-owned firms; 22.5 per cent of the top 500 companies are US-owned and another 23.5 per cent owned by other foreign interests.

The twenty-six county state has an extremely close working relationship with the imperialist monopolies. (They are given all kinds of financial incentives: no tax is levied on the export of profits until 1990, and from then to 2000 tax will be only 10 per cent on profits; there were interest-free loans and 50 per cent grants for plant and machinery.) Such incentives were one of the main factors in a huge increase in public spending, from 33 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in 1960 to 66 per cent in 1983. (In 1983, Britain's was, by comparison, 34 per cent of GDP). Consequently Ireland has one of the largest government debts in the world, £11.5 billion in 1983. (1,500 per capita, one of the highest in the world, and higher than Mexico or Poland). This is hitting the working class because they, rather than capitalists or rich farmers, are forced to bear a huge tax burden.

The use of state aid to attract multi-national investments, and now the creation of small businesses which rely for their existence on state grants, is also present in the twenty-six county economy.

Thus the twenty-six county state today is politically independent of British imperialism. But the growth of its economy is completely bound up with the development of the world capitalist economy in general. But the left-overs of 800 years of British domination - the chief one of which is partition - remain.

'Theories' which discount this contradiction, such as 'two-nationism', open the door to a cowardly disregard for the national question. But there must be no confusion about the fact that the southern bourgeoisie - the wretchedness of which is enshrined in partition and has recently been underlined by the Anglo-Irish agreement - will remain the arch-collaborator with Britain and other imperialist powers. Although it relies for political survival on bourgeois national sentiment, its greatest fear is of the working class, the only force which can carry through the simplest aim of bourgeois nationalism, i.e. national unification.

This influx of capital does not in itself make the twenty-six county state a 'US neo-colony', as the Workers Party Stalinists claim in an effort to justify their refusal to take a stand against partition. The fight remains one against Irish capitalism and British imperialist partition.

The working class now faces 20 per cent unemployment; pay battles and massive levels of taxation; the starkest symptom of

Ireland's crisis is the gigantic level of emigration. In fighting for democratic rights, and civil liberties such as abortion and divorce, the working class faces the reactionary alliance of Catholic church and state.

Theory of permanent revolution and Ireland

Marx stood for the self-emancipation of the working-class: Lenin and Trotsky, by leading the Russian revolution, showed how the working class in a backward country could most effectively carry out the tasks of the bourgeois or "democratic" revolution (in Russia's case, land reform, the break-up of the Tzarist empire) in the course of the working-class revolution. The fact that the bourgeois or democratic "stage" of the revolution carries over, uninterrupted, into the working-class revolution, is what makes it "permanent".

In Ireland, it follows that the "democratic" task of national liberation, which the Irish bourgeoisie were never able to carry out, is inseparably bound up with the struggle for socialism. But this struggle is an international one. It follows that the only allies of the Irish working class are the workers of all other countries. Our conception of the Irish working class as part of the European and international working class is based on the fact of the international nature of capitalist exploitation; it has nothing to do with those "socialists" who effectively tell the Irish people to "wait" until the working class in Britain and other major capitalist powers in Europe are "ready" to join in the struggle. On the contrary, we especially stress the fact that, by their collaboration and support for imperialism, and by their desperate efforts to prevent the British working class from taking up their position as allies of the Irish working class, the British labour bureaucracy represents the single most important obstruction to the victory of both British and Irish workers against capitalism.

The proof of the indissoluble connection between the solution of the national question and the whole world socialist revolution is the historical paralysis of the Irish bourgeoisie: it played a revolutionary role in 1798 but failed to end British colonial domination; in the 1830s it had already split the national movement along class lines; by the beginning of the



The struggle of the last 20 years 'objectively part of the struggle for socialism'

20th century it collaborated openly with British imperialism, first against its own working class in 1913, then in supporting the first world war; its total incapacity for fighting through the national question was clear in 1916, 1919-1920 and in the partition of 1922. The middle-class nationalist movements, too, were unable to solve the national question: the predominantly peasant Fenian movement, which Marx had hoped would drive the British out of Ireland, proved unable to do so; by 1916 the middle-class nationalist elements of the Volunteers were split on whether to support the rising - and split again over the 1923 Treaty.

Today, much more than in 1916, it is the working class, in the course of the struggle for socialism, that will be able to resolve the national question in Ireland; so while we contemptuously reject partitionist "socialism", and recognise that socialism in Ireland is inconceivable without defeating British imperialism and uniting the country, we also reject the Republican concept that national unity must be achieved before the struggle for socialism can begin.

Our insistence that the national question must be solved by the working class, in no way implies that defence of the right to national self-determination, or unconditional support against imperialism for the nationalist movement, can be shelved or sacrificed for an abstract "unity" so beloved by the reformists. We are for unity - but not at the cost of principles. We unequivocally oppose the Stalinists of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) who call for "unity" in support of peace and civil rights - on condition that "politics" (that is, the national question and the issue of the six-county state) is kept out of the trades unions in the north-east where they predominate. Even more politically ludicrous is the "unity" spoken of by the other wing of Stalinism, the Workers Party - "unity" within the six counties for "devolved government". The "Militant" tendency stands for a similar "unity" - within the confines of the six-county state created by British imperialism, and at the expense of any principled defence of those in military conflict with that state.

Working-class unity can only be fought for in the course of revolutionary struggles, which aim for working-class power and do not stop at reformist objectives. How else can the deep divisions in the Irish working class, the result of 65 years of partition, and 200 years of "divide and rule" methods by Britain and the economic favouritism extended to the north, be overcome? It has only been at the highest point of working-class struggle, when those struggles have challenged the state - the 1907 strikes, the 1913 Dublin lock-out, the 1932 unemployed struggles - that even temporary unity of the working class has been attained; when those struggles have ended sectarianism has been deliberately and consciously re-imposed. It is the development of revolutionary struggle, and the building of revolutionary leadership, that will open up the possibility of breaking protestant workers from loyalist politics; reformism and Stalinist methods of class collaboration have strengthened the political influence of loyalism.

Revolutionaries must support all struggles taken up by all sections of the working class in pursuit of their class interests. But if backward sections of the protestant working class are drawn in behind the loyalist pogroms against Catholics, we must support those who physically oppose them. (In other words, if a protestant worker on a picket line attacks a policeman in the course of picketing, we support him; if a protestant worker attacks the same policeman because he is resisting a loyalist pogrom in the name of bourgeois justice and the Anglo-Irish Agreement, we support Catholic workers' right to defend themselves, and ridicule any illusions that there is anything spontaneously "progressive" about the attack on the policeman.)

Our recognition of the leading role of the working class does not mean, either, exclusive emphasis on the trade-union struggle for reformist aims, or infatuation with the idea of creating a reformist party for the Irish working class displayed by some "Trotskyists". The struggle in the north since 1969 - the longest-running and bloodiest confrontation with state forces by any section of workers in western Europe since the war - has been carried out mainly by nationalist sections of the working class who, precisely because of the inherently sectarian nature of the twenty-six county state, are deprived not only of decent housing but also very often of jobs and therefore trade union membership.

We support all campaigns on issues of discrimination and



A banner of the Irish transport union, founded by Connolly, on a hunger-strike march

state violence; defence of the nationalist communities from both state and sectarian violence, by any methods, is also a principle we stand for without conditions.

The working class and the question of leadership

Since partition, the Irish working class has undergone massive growth. The trade union membership which was less than 200,000 in 1922 is now over half a million; half the workforce is unionised (a higher proportion than either Britain or West Germany); over 30 per cent of Irish people work in industry, 50 per cent in service industries and only one in five on the land.

The rural population has almost halved in the last 30 years and half the population of the twenty-six counties now live in or near Dublin. The working class is thus far larger than that of other former colonies or semi-colonies: the proportion of Irish people who work in industry (30 per cent) is more than in Mexico (26 per cent) or Argentina (28 per cent). But while the working class has made massive strides forward in trade union organisation, the unresolved national question continues to have a decisive effect on its political development.

The Irish working class carries history on its back in the sense that it is politically split, has no strong political party of its own; it has traditionally given its allegiance - at least in elections - to bourgeois nationalism (the majority of workers in the twenty-six counties vote for Fianna Fail, the main bourgeois nationalist party) and, in the case of protestant workers in the north-east, to Unionism.

In the early years of this century, Connolly, representing the revolutionary tendency in the Second International, and Larkin, representing the syndicalist tendency, took the leadership of decisive sections of the Irish working class. In 1916 Connolly attempted, with a small military working-class organisation, to take the leadership of the national struggle.

The early Communist Party, led by Connolly's son Roddy, failed to sink deep roots into the working class in the turbulent civil war period. The reformists who took the leadership of the trades unions then and have dominated them since, aligned themselves with partition just as internationally they had supported the first world war.



Defiance from the prisons: prisoners support an anti-strip search demonstration in Brixton

The hallmark of all reformist leaderships in Ireland since then has been their acceptance, always in deeds and almost always in words too, of partition, which has aggravated and deepened the divisions in the working class.

In spite of the small size of the CP, Stalinism has played a significant role in preventing the development of revolutionary leadership in Ireland (Up to now this question has often been underestimated by Trotskyists.) In the 1920s the Communist International stifled Roddy Connolly's attempts to build a communist organisation, in favour of opportunist links with Larkin and some Republican leaders; in 1934 it struck a blow at the Republican Congress movement by helping to impose the slogan "Irish Republic" against the "workers' republic".

In the 1960s, the Stalinist attempt to impose "stage-ism" on the Republican movement and to wind up the armed struggle led to the 1969-1970 split; in 1975 when the IRSP split from the Officials the latter used traditional Stalinist methods of thuggery and murder against the IRSP. Within the unions, Stalinism has also played a crucial role, striving to limit all struggles - both north and south of the border - to "non-political" issues which do not involve confrontation with the state.

Trotskyist leadership will be built in an uncompromising struggle against these tendencies. The basic points of its programme must include the nationalisation of the banks and major industries under workers' control and for the building of a socialist planned economy; for a united socialist 32-county Ireland with a state based on the power of the working class and small farmers, as part of a united socialist states of Europe; for driving out capital be it British or American, green or orange; for the expulsion of British imperialism, the destruction of the six-county statelet and all its reactionary sectarian apparatus, and for the destruction of the twenty-six county state and the defeat of the Irish bourgeoisie; for the separation of the church from the state and the breaking of the church's economic power, and the guarantee of welfare and civil rights.

It is by the re-building of the Fourth International, and a section in Ireland, that the crisis of working-class leadership - present in Ireland in such an acute form - will be confronted.

The national question and the Republican movement

The high level of development of industry, and of the working class, do not make the national question in Ireland irrelevant; on the contrary they bind its solution all the closer with the struggle for socialism.

We reject all pseudo-Marxist arguments which repeat the formula, "Ireland has had its bourgeois revolution", in order to avoid taking a stand on the national question. The Irish bourgeoisie was dragged and kicked through the early stages of its development by its British counterpart; it failed to achieve a republic in 1798 and has been split on the issue ever since; the agrarian question - which in other countries (China, India etc) combined with the national question to make up the "democratic" tasks in the imperialist epoch - was partially solved by agreement between the British and Irish bourgeoisie in the late 19th century (by the Land Acts, which effectively opened the way for a new section of small land-holders). Ireland's relationship with Britain denied it the possibility of a bourgeois revolution before the epoch of imperialism; that epoch brought partition and doomed the Irish bourgeoisie to impotency. Hence the national question is still unresolved. We also reject, forcefully, the pseudo-democratic argument that, because the majority of protestant workers politically support Unionism, a socialist programme must include the demand for federal government as a precondition for British withdrawal, or other concessions to reactionary Unionism. (This is "Socialist Organiser"'s position.) We are convinced that it is precisely the struggle for socialism and the expulsion of Britain which will enable the question of regional and religious differences to be resolved by the working class. Loyalism and Orangeism are, at root, products of British colonial domination; the question of breaking the political hold of Unionism will be solved, as will the national question, in the course of working-class struggles.

Our support for the right of Irish national self determination is unconditional and uncompromising. This means in practice not only demanding the immediate



The funeral of H-block hunger-striker Martin Hurson

withdrawal of British troops, but the destruction of the six-county state; it means ruthless opposition to all tendencies in the working class who oppose Ireland's national rights or equivocate on the issue; it means in particular British Trotskyists must oppose the chauvinistic pro-imperialist tendency in the British labour leadership which has supported and assisted the occupation. Support for the right to Irish national self-determination also means active defence of the Republican movement and its right to carry out the armed struggle with whatever methods it sees fit.

In particular, agitation on the issue of the more than 1,000 Republican political prisoners, the largest body of political prisoners in western Europe (many of these are still recognised as having political status by the British state), is obligatory for Trotskyists in Ireland and Britain particularly, and internationally. All other aspects of state repression against the Republican movement and the nationalist working class (use of show trials, paid perjurers, informers, intimidation and terror against communities etc) must be taken up.

While we stand unconditionally on the side of those fighting imperialism, and recognise the gulf between the collaborationist bourgeois nationalism of the De Valera type, and the active anti-imperialist nationalism of the Republican movement, we are opposed to the Republican movement on basic political issues.

To the nationalist belief that the liberation of Ireland can be achieved by the struggle in Ireland itself, we counterpose the fact that the Irish struggle is part of the international struggle of the working class.

The strategy of the Republican movement is that there are two stages in the struggle: first, the driving-out of British imperialism from the north by means of guerrilla warfare, mass campaigns and other forms of pressure; secondly, the gradual expulsion of foreign capital, nationalisation of large firms etc, by parliamentary legislation in a 32-county Republic.

To the Republican idea that national unification can be achieved first, followed by the gradual achievement of socialism by reformist means, we counterpose the necessity of a revolutionary socialist programme around which the

working class can be mobilised. Without such a mobilisation of the working class, a 32-county republic will never be realised. Neither will it be realised without the defeat of the southern bourgeoisie and their twenty-six county state, who remain dependable allies of British imperialism.

On this question we oppose the Republican movement politically: while they regard the southern bourgeoisie as faltering, or potential, allies in the national struggle, we regard them as mortal enemies who must be defeated, along with the loyalist bourgeoisie in the north, if national unification is to be achieved.

We do not demand of the Republican movement that it becomes socialist; but we insist that if it were consistently nationalist it would oppose the southern bourgeoisie who are second only to the loyalist bourgeoisie of the north as Britain's closest allies. (It is the Republican leaders' refusal to recognise the twenty-six county bourgeoisie as an irreconcilable enemy which reveals the middle-class character of their politics.)

It is this fundamental issue on which we oppose them, not on their recent decision to participate in the twenty-six county elections. Since their candidates were the only ones standing unambiguously for a united Ireland, it was correct to support them.)

We fiercely defend the Irish Republican Army's right to wage armed struggle against British imperialism. The present IRA military campaign is based on the belief that British imperialism can be forced to withdraw by a series of guerrilla operations against state installations, personnel, or capitalist-owned property; this strategy regards the mass of people as a reservoir of support to be called upon by the guerrilla force. To this we counterpose the strategy of mobilising the working class in revolutionary struggle against British imperialism and Irish capitalism, with military tactics being subordinated to that overall strategy. This is the only method by which imperialism can be defeated. The type of operations described above - carried out sometimes with heavy losses to the IRA itself or unnecessary civilian casualties - cannot, unconnected with working-class struggles, of themselves defeat imperialism. While defending the IRA's right to fight in whatever way it sees fit, we counterpose the strategy of working-class action to their strategy.

One aspect of the guerrilla struggle has been the IRA's policy of especially heroic and spectacular operations aimed at the individual execution of leading figures of the British state. To this strategy, based on putting pressure on that state by means of such operations, we again counterpose a strategy based on the mobilisation of the working class.

However, we defend the heroic fighters who used such methods, especially against the witch-hunt by Labour bureaucrats and Stalinists who join the capitalist class in decrying them as "terrorists".

The capitulation of all reformist and Stalinist leaderships to partition, including the old Stalinist-dominated leadership of the Official IRA before the 1970 split, meant that from the outbreak of the struggle in the north in 1969, they were reviled by nationalist workers. The SDLP, with its "radical" politics and refusal to take a stand in the struggle against imperialism, has failed in its efforts to break support for Republicanism in the nationalist communities.

Provisional Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA maintained a consistent position to the British army and the six-county state, and thus took the leadership of nationalist sections of the working class which defied the fiercest state onslaught in post-war western Europe (torture, internment, covert encouragement of fascist and loyalist murder gangs etc). The continuous defiance of the state by these communities for 18 years has proved an enormous source of inspiration to all those fighting imperialism internationally. From the end of the 1970s, Provisional Sinn Fein moved politically from right-wing nationalism and adopted radical political positions of nationalisation, expulsion of foreign capital, opposition to NATO, solidarity with other national liberation movements etc. These policies, and their adoption of various forms of community politics (setting up advice centres etc) increased their support in the nationalist communities. The campaign in support of the hunger strikers indicated the potential strength of the movement against British occupation. No revolutionary party worthy of the name could fail to recognise the importance of this prolonged confrontation with the state by sections of the working class. Participation and intervention in the struggle in the north, and the movements on the questions of state repression, are essential for Trotskyists.

Moreover the radicalisation of Sinn Fein under working-class pressure in the course of these struggles does not alter the fact that the Republican leaders adhere to the programme, and guerrilla methods, of middle-class nationalism. We reject the liquidationist idea that Sinn Fein - any more than any other middle-class nationalist movement - can spontaneously become socialist. We stand for the building of a Trotskyist party, a section of the Fourth International.

The Trotskyist movement in Ireland

The favourable conditions opened up to build Trotskyist leadership on an international scale, by the developments in the class struggle, are also present in Ireland. The crucial task is the building of such leadership.

To do so requires an estimation of the movement's failures and mistakes in the past.

In the early 1960s, the British Socialist Labour League (SLL) helped to form a Trotskyist organisation in Ireland, which won many shop stewards to its ranks, and won control of the youth movement of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. But the Healy leadership of the SLL had already adopted a practice of imposing



A 'Troops Out' march in London

policy on Irish Trotskyists, and others in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) from the SLL headquarters in London; this resulted, among other things, in the clumsy and premature disaffiliation of the NILPYS in line with developments in Britain, followed by the artificially-contrived expulsion of leading workers from the Trotskyist group.

When the struggles erupted in 1969, the ICFI's Irish section was completely unable to make an effective intervention, and eventually collapsed, principally because of the anti-communist way in which policy was imposed from London. This amounted to the loss of a crucial opportunity for the Trotskyist movement as a whole, and the breaking-up of the important cadre that existed among both protestant and catholic workers and youth.

This method was damaging enough in other countries; in Ireland it reflected all the chauvinist pressure of the British labour leadership. The SLL also failed to recognise at this point the role of the national question; while correctly raising the demand for the withdrawal of British troops, as soon as they entered Ireland, it combined this at first with calls for a devolved six-county state. It failed to grasp other basic questions, such as the depth of divisions in the working class, consequently failing to take a clear stand on the defence of nationalist communities. It said nothing about the role of Stalinism in the Official IRA (which it suggested in one period were socialist revolutionaries). These mistakes reflected the national insularity of the SLL, and its inability to grasp theoretically the way in which class struggle was developing in Ireland.

Subsequent attempts to form an IC section all suffered from the same problem: the chauvinistic and opportunist politics of the Healy leadership, which got worse as time went on. By the mid-1970s, in line with its further political degeneration, the WRP continuously attacked the IRA in the most chauvinistic terms, failing to adhere to the elementary principle of defence of those fighting imperialism.

The WRP split of 1985 made it possible for problems of the Irish revolution to be considered seriously for the first time for many years. The split resulted in a major change in our practical work in relation to Ireland. Since then we have campaigned on issues such as defence of Republican prisoners, the campaign on frame-ups of Irish people, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other methods of racist state harassment, directed against the Irish community in Britain, the country's largest immigrant community by far, must be carried out.

The WRP regards it as a central responsibility to actively assist the creation of a strong Trotskyist movement in Ireland. This will be done not by the imposition of policy from Britain was done by Healy, but in the spirit of collaboration with Irish comrades as fellow-internationalists. We are confident of our prospects.

It is resolved that:

1. The Congress elect an Irish commission which is responsible to the Central Committee (CC), and the Party Congress, and a CC comrade is appointed as its convenor. It should meet at least every two months. It should organise a debate in the Party on Ireland by preparing contributions on various issues for the internal bulletin.

2. The commission should assist the CC in providing centralised direction of Party work on Ireland.

3. The whole Party should campaign on issues connected with Ireland including such issues as: a united Ireland; troops out of Ireland; repeal the PTA; repatriation of Irish political prisoners; free the framed prisoners; stop strip-searching; ban plastic bullets.

The centre of our campaigning must be to raise the demand for British withdrawal from Ireland inside the British working-class organisations, and to pursue a relentless fight against the pro-imperialist labour leadership and all the methods by which it supports British occupation of the six counties.

Also the exposure of the state forces' role (MI5 etc) is vital. Such campaigns must be carried out, as required, together with Irish workers and their organisations.

4. A concerted programme of theoretical and practical work will create conditions for the Party to win support among Irish workers in Britain, and contribute to the building of a Trotskyist party in Ireland.

Message from Long Kesh

On November 8 last year, the Preparatory Committee for an International Conference of Trotskyists, which includes in its ranks Trotskyist organisations in many countries who are fighting to re-build the Fourth International, held a public meeting in London to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Russian revolution.

The platform included representatives of Trotskyist organisations in eastern and western Europe, the middle east and Latin America. A former South African political prisoner and a representative of the Kurdish Workers' Association also addressed the meeting.

The following message from Irish Republican prisoners of war at Long Kesh was read to the meeting:

FRATERNAL GREETINGS to you all from the H-blocks. It is with profound appreciation that we respond to an offer to make a contribution to your activity, and to extend our feelings of solidarity to you.

A human lifespan has passed since the Russian Revolution. It was a momentous event which established a bastion of anti-western imperialism on our globe. For many it heralded a way forward. Man and woman would find themselves reconciled with their dignity and cease to be lifeless appendages of capital. Yet, that is not the way things turned out. It is not our intention here to unravel the mysteries of 1917 and subsequent developments. We are concerned only for the future. However we accept the view of Trotsky that 'the party should and must know the whole of the past.'

What we would like to say is that people born in 1917, and who should this year be celebrating their 70th birthdays are not here to do so. Many others who should also be here are not. That those countless millions have been robbed of the ability to live is, in our opinion, a direct consequence of imperialism and the system of dominance and dependence which it has spawned and continues to reproduce.

We in Ireland have consistently struggled against imperialism. British jails are packed with anti-imperialist fighters and innocent non-combatants. They keep our bodies in concrete cells, but they fail miserably to suppress our minds or prevent our spirits embracing you in comradeship.

Regardless of what tactical differences may exist between ourselves and you, we remain united with you, we remain united with you as anti-imperialists and socialists. Only a socialist solution can end the global problem of imperialism.

In our efforts to acquire a better understanding of socialism we have, within the prison, undertaken a comprehensive study

of socialist thinkers and struggles. We are under no illusions about the enormity of the task that lies ahead.

Belfast of 1987 is not Moscow of 1917, and the British state apparatus, in its repressive and ideological dimensions, is a much more formidable adversary than anything produced by Tsarism. We look at all socialist theory and practice in terms of their applicability to Ireland. For this reason we constantly looked to our own socialist tradition contained in the writings of (James) Connolly, (Liam) Mellows, (Peadar) O'Donnell etc.

Nevertheless, socialism is internationalist, and our reading of Irish socialists is complemented by a rigorous investigation of such profound socialist theorists as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci, and study of the practical work in which they engaged. In the world today there is a pressing need to clarify socialist theory. While we must not be unthinking dogmatists trying to murder practicality in anachronistic conceptual strait-jackets, we must, more importantly, never dilute what is essential.

Where we can make allies we must not alienate them through narrow political sectarianism or meaningless rhetoric. Yet we must never go up the road of the revolution's graveyard, by trading the same ground as Marchais and the French Communist Party. Their rejection of the fundamental concept of working-class democracy, in favour of its bourgeois 'equivalent', gives new form to an old and dangerous trend.

As socialists we must be uncompromising on this issue. To do otherwise is to concede that we are no longer socialists. To those who choose such a path, we rebuke them with the immortal words of Trotsky: 'You are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out. Go where you ought to be, into the dustbin of history.'

Solidarity from the H-Blocks.

For more information about the International Conference of Trotskyists, and the Preparatory Committee, write to: Preparatory Committee, PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS.

To subscribe to "Workers Press", weekly newspaper of the Workers Revolutionary Party, write "Workers Press", PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS
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