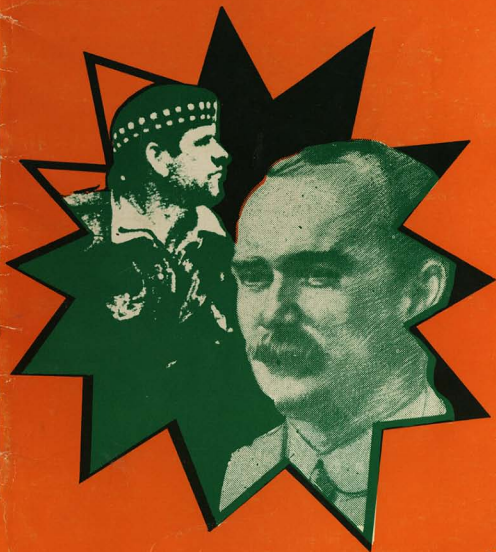




# Ireland UnFree

Bob Purdie



IMG PUBLICATIONS  
182 Pentonville Rd, London N1 0J-278 2646

blawst

blawst #2

# Ireland UnFree

## Bob Purdie

The Irish people have been subjected to a long and brutal history of oppression and exploitation. The British have ruled Ireland for centuries, and the Irish people have suffered the consequences of this rule. The Irish people have been denied the right to self-determination, and they have been subjected to a system of land ownership that has kept them in a state of poverty and dependence. The Irish people have been denied the right to education, and they have been subjected to a system of religious intolerance that has kept them in a state of ignorance and superstition. The Irish people have been denied the right to political participation, and they have been subjected to a system of corruption and bribery that has kept them in a state of political apathy and resignation. The Irish people have been denied the right to economic freedom, and they have been subjected to a system of economic exploitation that has kept them in a state of economic dependence and poverty. The Irish people have been denied the right to social justice, and they have been subjected to a system of social inequality that has kept them in a state of social oppression and discrimination. The Irish people have been denied the right to a better life, and they have been subjected to a system of social injustice that has kept them in a state of social despair and hopelessness. The Irish people have been denied the right to a free and democratic society, and they have been subjected to a system of authoritarianism and repression that has kept them in a state of social control and oppression. The Irish people have been denied the right to a better future, and they have been subjected to a system of social stagnation and backwardness that has kept them in a state of social decline and hopelessness. The Irish people have been denied the right to a better world, and they have been subjected to a system of social injustice that has kept them in a state of social oppression and discrimination. The Irish people have been denied the right to a better life, and they have been subjected to a system of social injustice that has kept them in a state of social despair and hopelessness. The Irish people have been denied the right to a better future, and they have been subjected to a system of social stagnation and backwardness that has kept them in a state of social decline and hopelessness. The Irish people have been denied the right to a better world, and they have been subjected to a system of social injustice that has kept them in a state of social oppression and discrimination.

# Foreward

"Today Northern Ireland is one of the most important military commands of the British Army, and the only one engaged in active operations . . . It has 13 major units of battalion size—10,000 men in all, deployed throughout the countryside of Ulster."

That is what the New Statesman said on 2nd April 1971. Since then the British military commitment has increased to 24 fighting units, more than half the total number of such units in the whole army. Heath, Maulding, and Faulkner have explicitly stated that they are involved in a war.

British imperialism has recognised that the struggle in Northern Ireland has transcended the civil rights stage and has become a struggle for national liberation, and the British press, which once gave half-hearted support to the civil rights movement, has now come to the defence of British imperialism. What is at stake is the continued existence of the State of Northern Ireland, and therefore the continued denial to the Irish people of their right to so self-determination.

By and large this fact is recognised by the imperialist forces in both Britain and Ireland.

It is not recognised, however, by the majority of groups in Britain, which claim to be socialist. The objective reason for this is the weight of imperialist ideas which has long acted as a millstone round the neck of the British left in relation to Ireland.

Bob Purdie's pamphlet is an important contribution to the battle for the eradication of this disease.

Fifty years ago, in a somewhat similar situation, John Maclean attempted a similar task in his pamphlet "Ireland's tragedy, Scotland's shame". It cannot be coincidental that both Maclean and Purdie spring from the Scottish as opposed to the English Labour Movement.

The experience which Scottish Marxists have gained of the national question in their own country aids them in the task of explaining to the more backward English movement the dynamics of the Irish revolution.

The lack of such an understanding on the part of British, and particularly English socialists prevents them from playing a meaningful role in solidarity with the Irish struggle.

Gery Lawless,  
January 1972.

# Contents

1: Civil Rights to Civil War	1
2: Conquest and Re-Conquest	7
3: Easter and After	13
4: Civil War to Civil Rights	17
5: Republicanism	27
6: The Political Left	39
7: Bourgeois and Social Democratic Parties	49
8: The Coming Irish Revolution	58

# Introduction

---

## DEDICATION

This pamphlet is dedicated to Peter Graham, a good friend, and a dedicated comrade. Those who murdered him have only succeeded in strengthening Irish Trotskyism, and have made the Fourth International more determined than ever to contribute to the victory of the Irish revolution.

*I have, throughout this pamphlet, used the device common to writers sympathetic to the Irish struggle, and refrained in most instances from using the 'legal' names of the two Irish states. Thus 'Northern Ireland' is usually called 'The Six Counties', 'The North', or 'The North East'; 'The Republic of Ireland', usually referred to in the British press by its pre-1948 name of 'Eire', has been rendered as either 'The 26 Counties', 'The South', or 'The Free State'. I must apologise to readers who are unfamiliar with Irish politics for any confusion this may cause, but the responsibility is entirely that of British Imperialism, and its Irish collaborators.*

Bob Purdie

# 1. Civil Rights to Civil War

---

It started quietly enough. A meeting of various organisations in Belfast in 1967; they called themselves the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and they issued the following statement of objectives:

- To define the basic rights of all citizens;
- To protect the rights of the individual;
- To highlight all possible abuses of power;
- To demand guarantees of freedom of speech, assembly and associations;
- To inform the public of their lawful rights;

Four and-a-half years later the campaign they launched has led to a situation brinking on civil war in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland. History is ironical, those who wish to understand it must seek through the skein of superficially contradictory events, the thread of logical development which leads to real understanding.

The initiators of the Civil Rights movement did not set out to provoke civil war, their motives were entirely opposite; they simply demanded British standards of justice in an area which was (legally speaking) part of Britain. But of course they were in Ireland, and willy-nilly they had to bear the weight of Irish history on their shoulders.

## October 1968 to August 1969

Irish history made its presence felt in Derry on October 5th, 1968. Before the press and television of the world the Royal Ulster Constabulary reacted to a Civil Rights demonstration exactly as they had always treated manifestations of uppityness amongst the natives. The hue and cry caused by their batoning of the M.P.s Gerry Fitt and Eddie MacAteer, and the brutality with which they treated the demonstrators, gave the Civil Rights movement international publicity; more

important it drew behind it the mass of the people for whose benefit it was fitting—the Catholic minority in the Six Counties.

The nature of Northern Ireland was underlined again in January 1969, when a march from Belfast to Derry organised by the Peoples Democracy was ambushed at Burntollet by Orange thugs, some of whom were later identified as off-duty members of the 'B' Specials. Constabulary. On the arrival of the marchers in Derry, they were attacked again. Later in the evening, when the RUC had been drinking heavily they invaded the Catholic Bogside, smashing windows and singing "Hey, hey we're the Monkees, and we'll monkey you around, until your blood is flowing on the ground". The following April they re-enacted the scene, this time beating Samuel Devenny to death.

### Radicals & Moderates

So the Civil Rights movement, conceived as non-violent, had violence thrust upon it.

An important factor which led to this was the internal struggle which went on within the Civil Rights movement, between the 'radicals' and the 'moderates'. Indeed while the moderates initiated the movement, the important actions which changed the situation were the responsibility of the radicals, and occurred against the wishes of the moderates.

The October 5th march in Derry, called in defiance of a ban imposed by the then Minister of Home Affairs, Craig, was opposed by the executive of the CRA. Similarly the Belfast/Derry march, which was ambushed at Burntollet, was held during a halt on demonstrations decided on by the CRA executive.

### The Final Blow

Then in August 1969 the final blow was dealt to the theory that peaceful change could be achieved in the Six Counties. The annual walk of the Apprentice Boys of Derry provoked a response from the Derry 'Young Hooligans', the violence spread. Bogside was once more attacked by the RUC, its defenders drove them back, and held them outside the Bogside, despite their frenzied pumping of canister after canister of CS gas into the area. At the same time the Falls in Belfast became the object of an attack from mobs of Orangemen, determined to wreak in Belfast revenge for the defeat the police were suffering in Derry. Here, too, despite six dead, hundreds of injured, and the burning out of whole streets of houses, the defenders of the Falls held out. Then Stormont announced the mobilisation of the 'B' Specials, i.e. the putting into uniform of the same thugs who had been trying to carry out a pogrom in Belfast. This was circumvented by the British government, who sent in troops; and guarantees were given that Bogside and Falls would be left behind their barricades, free from the intervention of either Six County or British forces.

### Peace: Armed and Unarmed

The peace that was achieved, was an armed peace. The inhabitants of Bogside and Falls had shown their ability to hold off the RUC and the

Orangemen, they would, undoubtedly, have shown their mettle against the British Army had the need arisen. But the British Labour Government had sent the troops in to achieve an unarmed peace, and with considerable political skill they proceeded to manoeuvre a situation in which they could get their foot.

Smiling Jim Callaghan slid past the barricades to chat to the people; "change was coming," he assured them, there would be a commitment by the London and Belfast governments to a package of reforms which would dispel the main grievances of the minority, and meet the main demands of the civil rights movement. With the immediate threat of a pogrom held behind the lines of British troops, and the future distinctly rosier, the pressing reasons for the barricades, and the opting out of the Northern state, by the citizens of Free Belfast and Derry had disappeared. Slowly at first, then with inevitable speed the unity began to disintegrate, the Catholic Church, and the 'moderate' Civil Rights leaders began to re-assert their influence, the barricades were taken down, and the people of Bogside and Falls slipped back to 'normality', and waited in expectation for the changes which were to come.

The ground was laid for the next stage in achieving an unarmed peace, (i.e. a peace in which everyone was disarmed except the British and Six County states). Some concessions were made; with a heavily armed British Army in the background it was not too risky to take the guns from the RUC; the 'B' specials were difficult to control, so they were abandoned in favour of a smaller Ulster Defence Regiment. And the granting of "One man one vote" cost nothing when there was little chance of any elections in the near future.

Patiently the British government waited, hopeful that the mass movement evoked by the Civil Rights campaign would subside, and some kind of stability could be reached, from which a permanent solution to the problem of Northern Ireland could be achieved. This 'phony peace' lasted almost a year.

Behind the facade of quiescence the elements which would shatter that peace were gathering. On the one hand the Catholic population, shocked to the core by the imminence of the terrible pogrom which had nearly swept over the Falls in August, began to prepare their defence, in case of future attacks of this kind. This was matched by a growth in the protestant Ulster Volunteer Force, as a substitute for the old 'B' Specials. If stability was to be maintained there had to be a reduction in the level of "unofficial" armaments, and a process of disarmament had to begin. The British government decided to start with the Catholics.

This fateful decision may well have been taken for military reasons. They could be sure that if they tackled the Catholics first the Protestant extremists would do nothing to make their task more difficult, on the other hand they could not rely on the armed vanguard of the Catholics, the IRA, standing by if they took on the UVF (in fact the "Official" IRA had a position of attempting to woo the Protestants, and might even support Protestant resistance to the

Army). An initial policy of disarming the Catholics was to be the prelude to a more generalised attempt at disarmament. But an additional factor was the internal crisis in the Unionist Party, an attack on the Catholics would take the heat off the 'moderates' within the Party, who were working with the British government.

Gradually the brittle relationship between the Catholics and the Army began to crack, and fragment. It was shattered for good in July 1970, when the British Army attempted to take the Falls by storm. A curfew was imposed (which they later admitted was illegal) four people were killed, and vast quantities of CS gas discharged. The curfew was finally broken by the women from other Catholic areas of Belfast who marched into the Falls bearing bread and milk for the hungry inhabitants. When the curfew ended the residents of the Lower Falls totted up the damage. It included walls and doors smashed down, upholstery slashed and torn, religious ornaments broken, and money stolen, large numbers of copies of the Republican newspaper 'United Irishman' had been burnt, and quantities of literature and documents seized. The amount of arms found was pathetic.

#### The IRA Emerges

But there was one other feature of the operation which underlined the new situation. The British Army had been met by the determined resistance of the Official IRA, who fought a sixteen hour gun-battle with them, resisting from street to street. The Falls was no longer the inadequately armed, defenceless ghetto that it had been eleven months previously. The battle of the Falls confirmed the most important change in Irish politics since the rise of the Civil Rights movement, the emergence of the IRA once more as an armed force, in conflict with British domination of their country, but this time linked indissolubly with the people of the Catholic ghettos.

The disillusion in the British Army on the part of the Catholic population turned to hatred, the resistance which the growth of the IRA implied turned to attack, as a new force the Provisional IRA entered the conflict. We will discuss the split in the IRA later, but it is necessary to underline the factors which led to the winning of mass support by the IRA, in most of the Catholic areas of Belfast.

The British Army had been carrying out raid after raid in Catholic areas, it had met the slightest flicker of opposition with immediate and devastating response, their extensive use of CS gas spread resentment since the gas had its worst effects on the old, the sick and very young children, i.e. those not involved in any violence. The more the British Army tried to quench the support for the IRA, the more it grew; the more it grew, the more the British Army was forced to take precisely the kind of actions which alienated the Catholic population further. In addition Stormont, (with the Protestant extremists breathing down its neck) brought in legislation making statutory sentences mandatory for people convicted of certain offences. Thus Crumlin Road jail saw

a steady trickle of prisoners arrested for giving some kind of support to the IRA. Women who demonstrated wearing combat jackets, and black berets, people found with small quantities of arms, etc. The way in which this was operated was so blatantly sectarian that it further deepened the hostility of the Catholic population. A good example of this was the man who was arrested by the Army outside Unity Flats during the regular parade of supporters of the Protestant Linfield soccer team, who on their way home to the Shankhill Road indulged in sectarian songs and abuse against the Catholic residents of the flats. During a break in the noise caused by the singing of 'The Sash' and the shouting of slogans which advocated sexual relations with the Bishop of Rome, one man, separated from the Protestants by a broad rank of British troops was heard to shout 'Up the IRA', he was arrested and given six months. The fact that he was a mental defective was not considered any kind of defence. Thus step by step the IRA built up support, while the British Army became increasingly brutal in its treatment of the Catholics, indeed their attitude became practically the same as the RUC and 'B' Specials whom they had elbowed out of the way in 1969.

#### Guerrilla War & Internment

It soon became clear that the British Army faced an urban guerrilla war, a war which was probably tougher than the Black & Tan war and one of the most sophisticated guerrilla campaigns that has ever been seen. Within a few months the Army was totally incapable of making any progress, the audacity of the IRA volunteers knew no bounds, they pulled off coup after dazzling coup, while the Crown forces fumed impotently.

It was this situation which led to internment; that this caused the greatest violence ever, that in the two months following internment more British soldiers were killed than in the previous two years, cannot in fairness be blamed on the British Army. They were sceptical about the value of internment as a repressive measure, and the decision to impose it was taken by the British government for purely political reasons.

Having run through two previous Unionist Prime Ministers, the British government were not too anxious to lose another, but the lack of success in holding the IRA meant continuous pressure on Faulkner from the ultras inside and outside his party. With the problem of the Apprentice boys walk coming up again it was necessary to get some kind of deal which would mollify the Protestant right when the march was banned. Internment was the bait.

The British Army relied on the RUC files as a guide to potential internees, these lists were completely out of date, and moreover the files on extreme Protestants were 'lost'. It was inevitable that internment would lead to mass resistance, but the injustice and brutality with which it was accompanied sustained the resistance and made it impossible for the 'moderate' leaders of the Catholics to do any other than go along with the breach between the Catholics and the Six County state.

The SDLP plans for an alternative assembly are motivated not so much by a desire to smash Stormont, as by a desire to keep at the head of the mass of the Catholic people. The 'moderates', starting with a desire to get change within the existing system ended by opting out of that system. Their action proved conclusively that the hope of achieving British standards of justice within the Six County state was a vain one. History cannot be denied.

From Civil Rights to a situation brinking on Civil War, why has this happened? How can the minority in the North get justice? To answer this we must come face to face with the history which has worked so inexorably in Ireland in the last five years.

## 2. Conquest + Re-Conquest

Frederic Engels attempted to write a history of Ireland, he did not complete it, but the approach taken in the fragment which we have is significant. Engels starts by discussing Ireland's geographical position, goes on to talk about her geology and climate, before moving on to a description of Ancient Irish society ending with the Norse invasion in 795.

Engels understood that in order to analyse Irish political problems, one should begin with the special features which mark Ireland out politically and culturally from other European countries. Ireland's geographical position meant that her more powerful feudal neighbour England had to await the development of marine transport, a state structure and permanent army before being able to make any sustained attempt to annexe Ireland's wealth. Thus it was met by a developed Celtic society, and cultural as well as economic resistance. Ireland's paucity of exploitable mineral resources meant that she was not able to develop as an industrial power, condemning her to a role as an agricultural reserve for England, contrasting with Scotland and Wales which were able (to some extent) to participate in England's industrial expansion.

### Plantation and Pale

The history of Ireland is a history of conquest and re-conquest, the conquest by England of the lands of the native Irish, the plantation of settlers to replace the Irish and the setting up of laws to keep the natives off the land. The Irish inevitably crept back onto their land either as tenants or by painfully buying their land back. Just as the Irish inevitably got back their land they also advanced their culture, not only resisting and overcoming attempts to destroy it, but absorbing whole sections of the planted English population into their culture. The English were never able to maintain 'The Pale', as a barrier to the native Irish.

Even the fiercest and most successful conquest, the Cromwellian, backed by the relentless urges of a capitalist class newly come to power, failed to drive the native population into the province of Connacht.

#### The Ulster Plantation

However there was one exception to this pattern: the last Province to be subdued, Ulster. The key difference was that the land here was not simply transferred to a new caste of British landowners and aristocrats, but was rented out in small and medium sized lots to working farmers. The 'Ulster Custom' gave them security of tenure, and other privileges.

From 1609 large numbers of land-hungry lowland Scots flooded into the North East of Ireland, establishing themselves as a prosperous and energetic force in the economy. In addition to their different land tenure they were distinguished from the native Irish, by religion, being mostly Presbyterians; and while they were discriminated against by an Anglican establishment, they had privileges and nevertheless presented a cultural and economic entity which was sharply distinguished from the Gaelic/Catholic Irish.

They were colonists, during such times as they could wring a good living from the land, and tax and rent demands were not too severe, they could live with their English overlords; but the disinherited, papist Gaels were an ever present threat to their privilege. The division between Gael and planter, between landholder and landless, between privileged and dispossessed became expressed in the division between Protestant and Catholic. Thus in Ireland more than in any other part of the world, political, economic and class differences were expressed in theological terms.

#### The Protestant Ascendancy

For many of the Irish people the dispute between their nation and England became a dispute about religion, and they supported that faction of the British ruling class which embraced Catholicism. Thus when James the Second ascended to the throne and came into conflict with the Protestant section of the ruling class, they supported his efforts to maintain his throne. Many of the wealthier Catholics would have benefited from the re-distribution of land following a defeat of the Protestants and the ending of the Ulster Custom; but the masses would have gained nothing. In any case there was no road forward for the Jacobites. James was defeated, and the Ulster planters joyfully saw their position consolidated by the accession to the throne of the victor of the Battle of the Boyne, William of Orange.

#### The United Irishman

Nevertheless, the presbyterians and dissenters were settlers, their interests were in conflict not only with the natives, but with the masters at home. They gave birth to an Ulster presbyterian bourgeoisie, based on the linen industry, which had its own economic and cultural interests and which having been in Ireland for generations, identified

itself as Irish. From this bourgeoisie sprang the Society of United Irishmen.

For a short time the northern eastern Presbyterian bourgeoisie was the most progressive section of the capitalist class in the whole British Isles, and Belfast was a haven of enlightenment and religious toleration. Wolfe Tone, a presbyterian, issued a pamphlet arguing for Catholic rights, and he later created the United Irishmen, who inspired by the French revolution, by Tom Paine, and the light of democratic ideals, turned history upside down. The planters made common cause with the natives against their masters in England. Their demand was for separation from England, their means were the uniting of all Irishmen regardless of creed.

Only armed struggle could break the connection with England, only in an alliance with France could the breach be maintained. The tragedy of the United men was that, by the time they were ready to make the break, Bonaparte had risen above the French thermidor, and the revolution had shed its early democratic altruism. Help was promised, but it came tardily and too late, the rising of 1798 was defeated, Tone committed suicide, and the torch he had lit guttered out in the 1803 conspiracy of Robert Emmet, after England dissolved the Irish Parliament and imposed the Act of Union.

#### Democracy or Empire

The Ulster presbyterian bourgeoisie was given an historic choice, it could stand by the democratic principles of Tone, and defy a strong British ruling class; or it could make common cause with the British ruling class, join in the expansion of the developing British empire, and develop its industry as part of the Glasgow/Liverpool complex. The Presbyterian bourgeoisie plumped for the British empire, and in token of the new relationship of forces, Britain extended the privileges of Anglicans to all Protestants, and the Orange society opened its doors to Presbyterians and dissenters.

#### Catholic Rights and Repeal

From that time the fight for the Irish nation was almost exclusively that of Catholic Irishmen, and it was politically dominated by the rising Catholic bourgeoisie.

It shared all of that bourgeoisie's vices, personified by Daniel O'Connell. O'Connell's agitation was a retreat from the United Irishmen, it limited itself to Catholic emancipation, but it did create a mass movement, which was forced willy-nilly to go over to a demand for repeal of the Act of Union. But when the pressure was put on him from England O'Connell retreated even from repeal.

#### The Fenians

But the spirit of Irish nationalism as expressed by Tone did not die, a new force arose within the repeal movement around the newspaper, 'The Nation'. A group of writers, and political agitators formed around it known as 'Young Ireland'. Though at first politically conservative,



they produced three great men, Davis, Lalor and Mitchell, who re-created the powerful democratic spirit of Tone, and welded the struggle against English domination back to its true base, the struggle for democracy, linked to the mass struggle against the English landlords.

Fenianism became the developed expression of the tradition of Tone, Davis, Lalor and Mitchell, but it based its programme for the freedom of Ireland on means rather than ends. Fenianism divided itself from the more moderate nationalist movements by its insistence on physical force as the only basis for the struggle. Its organisational structure was modelled on the Irish peasant secret societies and the European revolutionary/democratic conspiratorial movements. The inner core of Fenianism was the Irish Republican Brotherhoods, its strategic reserve was the Irish emigrant population in the United States.

Despite the consistent lack of success of Fenianism's military efforts, it became the expression of all of the genuine revolutionary and progressive elements within the petit bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, the peasantry and the newly developing working class. Fenians were consistently involved in struggle in rural areas, leading assaults on the landlords, and direct action by the oppressed tenants. They acted like a leaven within the broader nationalist and rural movements, exercising an influence quite out of proportion to their size.

#### The Famine

But Catholic rights and Repeal and separation were overshadowed by calamity which scars the Irish nation even today; the famine. A peasantry, able to gain a precarious living only by intensive cultivation of the potato, was faced with an outbreak of potato blight which was partial in 1845, general in 1846 and absolute in 1847. Starvation, disease and emigration reduced the Irish population by one-third, the rural population by one-half. (The effects are evident in the under-populated Ireland of today.) But during the entire period of the famine Ireland exported to England enough foodstuffs, both meat and grain, to feed the entire starving population twice over. In other words the English landlords were directly responsible for the sufferings of the Irish people; a profound new factor was inserted into the relations between the two countries, the hatred against the English oppressor spread deep into the population and is alive to this day.

After the famine Ireland became more and more a supplier of agricultural produce to England, but Ireland suffered very greatly from England's policy of Free Trade; Ireland had no way to protect the development of her own economy and had to sell her produce at prices determined by the fierce competition of the European market.

The disaffection penetrated ever wider sectors of the Irish population, thus arose the Home Rule party of Parnell, instigated and led by the Southern Irish bourgeoisie, but with a broad base in the rural population, who had been politically aroused by the mass movement for amnesty of Fenian prisoners.

#### Home Rule - Tariffs

The disgrace and death of Parnell led to the degeneration of his party into the Catholic sectarianism and political cowardice of Redmond. The nationalist movement became fragmented. Redmondism was supported by the sections of the bourgeoisie which could gain from winning concessions from imperialism, the Sinn Fein (the name means 'Ourselves Alone' implying self-reliance) of Arthur Griffith was based on an alliance of the new sectors of small manufacturers and small business men, who wanted protection for the development of their industry against outside competition, and wide sectors of the petit-bourgeoisie and intellectuals. The Fenians in the Irish Republican Brotherhood worked secretly within Sinn Fein and other national movements, giving their support to the Gaelic revival through the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge) which brought fresh force and new life into the nationalist movement.

Thus although the political terminology of the movement was democratic, and even radical, it gained its impetus from the drive for protection, the erection of tariff barriers which could shelter a native Irish industry. The smaller the businessman the grander the dreams of an industrialised Ireland; Griffith even talked about Irish colonies!

But in the North the Protestant bourgeoisie had no interests in protection, they had a privileged position, and were integrated into British industry. Their interests would have suffered severely if they had been separated from England by a wall of tariff barriers.

#### Land Acts & Home Rule

But the relationship of England to Ireland was never one of unremitting repression. The geographical proximity of Ireland, its political integration into the United Kingdom, the large numbers of Irish in Britain, and the need to guarantee the continued supply of Ireland's agricultural produce, meant that they had to come to grips with the problems created by a violent disaffection in the countryside, and a national movement with wide support. Thus from the latter part of the 19th century, attempts were made to give concessions which while maintaining British domination, would take the edge off the resistance. The Land Acts gave a large proportion of the peasantry the ownership of their land, and while they paid dearly for the privilege, and only a portion of them benefited, this combined with rural depopulation to take a lot of steam out of the rural struggle, shifting the emphasis of the national movement more firmly to the protectionist bourgeoisie. The Home Rule Bills were designed to mollify them by setting up an Irish parliament which would be able to impose some degree of protection.

But the Northern bourgeoisie would have none of it, it had powerful friends in England and the First and Second Home Rule Bills were strangled at birth. The Third produced a crisis of unforeseen dimensions, a crisis which led to the most important event in modern Irish history, the Easter rising of 1916.



## 3. Easter and After

---

On Easter Monday 1916, the customers in the GPO Dublin were rudely disturbed by a group of men in ill-assorted uniforms, who proceeded to usher everyone out and smash the windows. In St. Stephens Green a party of armed men (with a woman, Countess Markievicz, second in command) set up a post. A small group of men attacked Dublin Castle, while positions were taken in Jacobs Biscuit Factory, Bolands Bakery and the South Dublin Union, Padraig Pearse read a Proclamation outside the GPO. The Republic of 1916 was established.

Despite the extremely effective urban guerilla tactics of the insurgents, the rising was defeated. The initial reaction of the mass of the Irish people was stunned amazement. The captured leaders, sentenced by a Court Martial, were shot one by one; James Connolly, too weak from wounds sustained in the GPO, was executed strapped to a chair. The mood of the Irish people began to change, and the rebels became heroes. This was the precursor of a deep political change within Ireland: the mass of the people moved from Home Rule to the Republic, from the craven prostration of Redmondism, to the defiant stance of Sinnéinism.

Superficially it might appear that the martyrdom of the leaders of the Rising had unleashed a flood of sympathy for their cause; in fact they had acted as a catalyst to crystallise changes wrought by the events of the preceding six years.

### Home Rule & The British Ruling Class

The English Liberals had maintained an alliance with Redmond's Irish Nationalists through promises of a Home Rule Bill; this was largely a rhetorical promise, but the elections of 1910 weakened the liberal government so that they were obliged actually to introduce a

Bill. The crisis which this Bill precipitated represented a deep split within the British ruling class, but as had happened before in history the conflict was fought out on Irish soil.

The Liberals under Lloyd George had developed a fairly sophisticated strategy of gaining stability in Ireland through making concessions to the Bourgeois Nationalists. Lloyd George had also used the support of the Nationalists to break the power of his rivals within the British ruling class, who had been using the House of Lords to frustrate his government's measures. As a quid pro quo he introduced the Home Rule Bill.

The Tories were frantic with fear for they much preferred to rely on good old fashioned repression, and were deadily afraid that if the British workers and the Irish people were able to raise their heads they would see the advantages of an alliance. When the Third Home Rule Bill was introduced they launched an attack of quite astounding ferocity.

#### The Tories Back Carson

The initial reaction to the Bill in Ireland, North and South, was to prepare quietly for its implementation; and to square up to the class conflicts which would come to the fore once the issue between Ireland and England was ameliorated. But the Tories struck back at Lloyd George through Belfast, by openly backing Carson, a reactionary Irish protestant politician who had launched a campaign to defeat Home Rule. In the North East of Ireland the protestant bourgeoisie had used the old religious divisions to weaken the working class; the protestant workers were bound up with their masters through

the Orange Order which dispensed patronage and maintained a system of mythology which convinced the protestant workers that the Church of Rome was their main enemy. The Northern landowners and Capitalists had nothing to gain, and a lot to lose from Home Rule, and the Southern pressure for tariffs. Quite cynically the Tories and the Northern rulers created a mass movement; the Ulster Volunteer Force, from the protestant workers and small farmers, armed it with German guns, and threatened the elected British government with armed insurrection.

#### Response from the South

The resistance in the North stirred the South, in reply to the U.V.F. the Irish Volunteers was created, and soon it became a mass armed force for the defence of Home Rule. The Irish Republican Brotherhood operated behind the scenes in creating the Volunteers, but left nominal command in the hands of 'respectable' Gaelic Leaguers.

As the crisis developed, there began to be hints that the solution could take the form of the partition of Ireland, with part of the North East being separated from the rest of Ireland.

But the crisis was cut across by the outbreak of war between Britain and Germany. The British ruling class, the Redmondites and the Carsonites buried their differences until such time as Germany had been defeated. Large numbers of both sets of Volunteers marched off to

the battlefields of Europe, the Ulster men to die for their Crown and Faith, the Irish to die for the freedom of small nations, and Catholic Belgium.

#### England's Difficulty—Ireland's Opportunity

Redmond's propaganda proclaimed that support for Britain's war effort would result in concessions by the British government. But there were some who refused to be deceived. They saw England's difficulty as Ireland's opportunity: the existence of the Irish Volunteers, and the crisis caused by the Home Rule Bill, presented the first opportunity, since the United Irishmen to strike a blow at the English connection with any hope of success.

As could be expected the Irish Republican Brotherhood began to prepare for a rising, but they were to be joined by an entirely new force, which had important repercussions for the outcome of the struggle, and the shape of Irish politics then and now.

#### The Irish Citizen Army

In 1913 the workers of Dublin had fought a bitter struggle against the employers and the British government. The Dublin General strike was the signal that labour had emerged as a powerful factor in Irish society. The strike was led by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union which in turn was led by James Larkin and James Connolly, two extremely capable working class organisers. To defend the strike pickets against the police and troops the Union formed a defence force, which became the first armed workers militia in the world—the Irish Citizen Army.

Leadership of the ICA was soon taken over by James Connolly, who forged it into a disciplined force, with a high level of political motivation. As the Home Rule Bill crisis progressed, Connolly realised that there was a likelihood of partition being imposed, and he forecast that this would lead to a 'carnival of reaction, North and South'. The events confirmed the policy which he had advocated throughout his major part of his political career, that the working class had to make its own national cause their own, and the aim of the national struggle, combined with the workers struggle, should be an Irish Workers Republic. He started to agitate along the lines which the IRB were already planning, i.e. that a blow should be struck while England was at war in Europe. The IRB were afraid that Connolly's agitation might uncover their own plans, so they kidnapped him and invited him to come in with them. He accepted and was co-opted onto the IRB War Council, becoming a major influence on the shape which the plans for the Rising took.

#### The Rising

The conspirators were hampered by the fact that only a handful of leaders of the national movement were prepared to strike the blow; the head of the Volunteers, Eoin MacNeil, countermanded the orders for mobilisation when he discovered the plans. Only a tiny proportion

of the Volunteers turned out, and the Rising failed to strike any significant response outside Dublin. But the response, although too late to save the lives of the leaders, did come. By 1918 the sympathy of the mass of the Irish people was for Republicanism, Redmond and the Nationalists were swept away, and the vehicle of political struggle became Sinn Féin.

#### Dail Eireann

Sinn Féin was at best a weak vessel—its ideology was compounded of mysticism and monarchism. Its founder, Arthur Griffith, had come out against the Rising, and had denounced the workers in 1913. But the IRB had penetrated Sinn Féin quite effectively, cleared out its Monarchism and made it Republican, and used it as the instrument for the next stage of their plan. Sinn Féin's advantage was that it had developed a strategy for the breach of the English connection which exactly suited the situation. This involved the Irish MPs refusing to take their seats at Westminster, and instead setting up their own parliament in Ireland, which would proceed to take over the administration of the Irish nation. In the General election of 1918 Sinn Féin won practically every seat in Ireland outside the Six Counties of what is now Northern Ireland. The MPs met in the Mansion House Dublin, and set up Dail Eireann. The Dail ratified the proclamation of the Republic of 1916 and issued a democratic programme.

The Irish people, who had stood by stunned in 1916, proved themselves more than capable of holding off the efforts of the British to smash the Dail. The Irish Republican Army carried out a fierce war against the military might of the British Empire. The Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries pillaged their way through the four provinces, the Kings Own Scottish Murderers burned down the main street of Cork, and wore burnt Corks in their bonnets afterwards in celebration. But despite the pouring out of arms and resources Britain could not crush the Irish people.

But Britain, unable to win by military means, succeeded by political means in winning the very solution which had been posed at the height of the Home Rule Crisis—partition.

## 4. Civil War or Civil Rights

---

The most heroic people will be waried by war. The war that Britain imposed on the Irish was so horrifying in its brutality that both the people and the fighters were worn down. When Lloyd George appealed in a letter to the President of the Irish Republic, Eamonn de Valera, in June 1921, for a 'conference here in London to explore to the utmost any possibility of a settlement', the Republican government accepted. There were of course other factors involved; the national revolution had shown signs of growing over into a social revolution, the Republic Courts had been used to prevent land seizures in rural districts, and the workers in some areas had become extremely militant; in Knocklong they took over the creamery, and ran it under workers control. These factors disturbed British capital, and the conservative elements in the Dail alike.

The Treaty negotiations centred around the question of the allegiance of Ireland to the British monarch, which was resolved in an acceptance by the Irish delegation (after heavy pressure) of a formula whereby the members of the Dail would take an oath of loyalty to the British monarch. Nothing could have been better calculated to hide what the Treaty was really about—Partition.

#### Northern Ireland Established

In 1920 the British had passed the Government of Ireland Act, (which was in fact the long delayed Third Home Rule Bill). This had made provision for two parliaments within Ireland, in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, and the Twenty Six Counties of Southern Ireland. The Act was universally regarded as a propaganda gesture, and Sinn Féin took advantage of the elections called under the Act to elect the Second Dail.

Despite the reluctance of the Northern Unionists to have any form of 'Home Rule' by the opening of the negotiations the 'Government of Northern Ireland' had been established, and was a factor in the situation. The package agreed by the negotiations included a provision that this government could opt the Six Counties out of the 'Irish Free State' (Saorstát Éireann) which of course it did; however the Irish negotiators, Griffith and Collins, were convinced that by means of the Boundary Commission included in the Treaty they could break the Catholic dominated areas of the Six Counties away, and make the remaining Unionist enclave unviable, thus paving the way for a re-unification.

#### Sell-out and Civil War

In the Dail too the dispute centred around the oath, and as in London, the debate in Dublin hid the real disputes. Despite the acceptance of the treaty by the Dail a section of the Republican forces refused to accept it and under Rory O'Connor and Liam Mellows they occupied the Four Courts in Dublin; each side regarded the other warily for a time.

The crunch came on 26th June, 1922. Mellows and O'Connor were preparing their forces to go North, to deal with an outbreak of savage pogroms against the Catholics in the Six Counties. In Westminster, Winston Churchill declared that failure of the Free State government to deal with the Republicans would lead to the British government considering the Treaty void, and taking appropriate action. Under such duress, and with guns borrowed from the British, the Free Staters bombarded the Four Courts. The Irish Civil War was on.

The war was lent bitterness by the desire of both sides to get the thing over with as soon as possible, and the de-humanising effects of the Black and Tan War. It ended with the inevitable defeat of the Republicans; broken not so much by the military superiority of the Free Staters, as by the apathy of an Irish people confused and bone weary of war.

#### Partition Ratified

The Civil War ended in April 1923; the now firmly established Free State Government approached the British Government to implement the Boundary Commission. The Six County government sabotaged the Commission by refusing to nominate its representative, but eventually the British Government nominated a Six County representative, who met with the British and Free State delegates to consider the problem. After a long wrangle the Commission by a 'majority' recommended that the only changes to be made in the border would be the gaining of a large chunk of Donegal by the Six Counties. The Free State government, having fought a war over an oath, was unable to fight one to reverse this swindle, and accepted an offer whereby the boundary commission was removed from the treaty. In 1925 Partition was established.

#### The Curse of Partition

The history of Ireland, from that point, was determined by the abortion of the national/democratic revolution. British Imperialism wanted to halt the progress of the struggle in order to be able to maintain economic, if not direct political control over Ireland. The Catholic bourgeoisie, who had caught up with the struggle after their rejection of it in 1916, had been able to re-assert their control over the masses due to the absence of any conscious alternative. The execution of the leaders of the 1916 rising had eliminated the best of the radical/democratic Republicans, and the sole representative of working class revolutionary theory, James Connolly. Pearse's successors in the IRB and Sinn Féin were unable to understand the importance of his last work 'The Sovereign People', which came near to Socialism, albeit on an idealist plane; and Connolly's successors to Socialism, were unable to understand the importance of his 'Labour in Irish History', that the victory of the national message was a central part of the tasks of the working class, and that only in a workers'Ireland could true independence be consolidated.

Partition has never been anything but a curse on the whole Irish people. The separation of the industrialised North from the agricultural South (the Six County area co-incides almost exactly with the industrialised area of 1911) and their economic insulation from each other, has had a deleterious effect on both portions. The North developed along the lines which suited British industry, and thus suffered from the concentration of that industry in the Midlands/South East regions of England. The South, with the lower rate of production of wealth of an agricultural country, has had to rely to a large extent on importing manufactured goods in a world market which discriminates against the primary producers, in favour of the industrialised nations. Under this crushing weight the two economies have been kept backward and Ireland as a whole impoverished. If the North has enjoyed a higher standard of living than the South this has been due initially to its higher level of industry, but increasingly to the direct political action of the British government, most strikingly seen in the amount of money which Britain pumps into Northern Ireland's welfare services. Even a united capitalist Ireland (if such a thing came about), would be wealthier, as a result of the more powerful leverage of an economy which integrated Northern industry and Southern agriculture.

The abortion of the revolution created two seemingly stable states, and as the decades have rolled by it has seemed to many that these states had a historical legitimacy which it would be foolish to challenge. Nothing could be further from the truth: their stability has derived from the weakness of the forces capable of changing them, rather than from the strength of those determined to uphold them. History had moved swiftly between 1916 and 1922, but now after partition its metabolism slowed down until the changes crystallising within the structure of society became almost imperceptible. Essentially the short circuiting of the national revolution created

two artificial societies, in which the antagonisms which had been their basis, instead of acting for change, re-inforced the artificial states which had been created.

#### The Christian Province

The Six County State was founded to keep a British bridgehead against the Irish revolution, and it could only survive by institutionalising religious sectarianism. The Unionist Party bosses in the North East had traditionally kept their power by the expert manipulation of the religious divisions within the mass of the inhabitants of the area. The old liberal tolerant Belfast was swamped in the early 19th Century by the influx of people from rural areas seeking work in the developing industries. They brought with them the traditional religious sectarianism of the countryside, and this was seized upon by the captains of industry as a means of weakening the power of their workers. Time after time in the Six Counties Protestant and Catholic workers have found common cause against the employers, and every time sectarian passions have been used to break up that unity. Thus, in the years preceding the Home Rule crisis Larkin and Connolly succeeded in creating exemplary pockets of working class unity across the sectarian lines. Indeed a whole section of the Orange movement, the Independent Orange Order, began to move towards a radical position, supported workers struggles, and extended a hand to their Catholic fellow workers. Carson's agitation short circuited this process, and sharpened up the sectarian divisions once more. In 1932 following an unemployed hunger march the RUC attacked unemployed workers in the Falls, firing over their heads, whereupon the unemployed of Shankill rose up in support of their fellow workers. The Unionists then embarked on a calculated campaign to convince the Protestants that the Catholics were the cause of their unemployment, and ran a vicious campaign denouncing "Loyalists" (i.e., protestants), who employed "Dis-loyalists" (i.e., Catholics). Their campaign was eminently successful.

The Unionists kept control over the masses through the Orange Order, which united the most rich and powerful in brotherly union with the most poor and humble, provided that they were faithful to the Crown, and the Faith which had established their blessed Christian province. The system of patronage dispensed through the Order, the social life, and the role of the Order as a Friendly Society made it difficult for any Protestant worker to either refuse to join or to leave once in membership. Within the Lodges systematic indoctrination was carried out to delude the Protestant with a tissue of myths which would keep him so afraid of the Romish conspiracy, and its agents in Dublin, that he would be glad of what little he had within his claustrophobic little enclave.

Northern Ireland is often call Ulster, but in fact its six counties exclude 3 counties of the historic province of Ulster. That it is a completely artificial creation can be seen by an examination of the Border. The territory of the state was fixed out of one consideration

only—the creation of the largest possible area of Unionist domination. Of the Six Counties Antrim has a 70-80% Protestant/Unionist population, Down has 60-70%, Derry and Armagh have 50-60% while two counties Fermanagh and Tyrone, have a minority of Unionists with only 40-50%. The picture is complicated by the uneven distribution of both factions who are scattered over the entire area, but what is certain is that the only solid area of Unionist support consists of Belfast and peripheral areas. The City of Derry has been a classical example of the effects of the border, for not only does it have a two-to-one Anti-Unionist majority, but it has been cut off from its natural hinterland in Co. Donegal. Derry too is the classical example of that grand old Ulster institution, the gerrymander. In 1966 revision of electoral wards within the City three wards which each elected eight councillors were created. The South Ward contained 14,125 anti-Unionists, and 1,474 Unionists, North Ward had 3,173 anti-Unionists and 4,380 Unionists, and Waterside had 2,804 anti-Unionists to 4,420 Unionists. Thus the 20,102 Catholics elected eight councillors, and the 10,274 Protestants elected 16 councillors. Thus did the descendants of the Apprentice Boys who barred the gates of Derry against King James, in the name of freedom and the constitution, keep those gates barred against control of the City by the majority of its inhabitants.

#### The 'Free' State

The Irish middle class, which has recoiled in horror from the 1916 rebellion, and had later placed itself at the head of the revolution created the Irish Free State in its own image. They won power in a bloody civil war during which they desperately shot hostages in an attempt to blackmail the Republicans into surrender. Even after the Republicans had 'dumped arms' they refused to release the detainees. It was only towards the spring of 1924 that the last of the Republicans dribbled out of the Jails and detention camps.

With the masses passive, the conservative elements who had taken over the revolution consolidated their power; the Treaty was placed on a pedestal, as a famous victory and the Catholic Church was allowed to exert an unchallenged influence over the state. The patron saint of the ruling party, Cumann na nGaedhael (Irish Party) was Arthur Griffith; for Griffith the holiest of doctrines was protection, but Cumann na nGaedhael eschewed this doctrine as rank heresy. Their concentration was on the stabilisation of agriculture, this was geared to the British market, and such a policy excluded protection. These policies were determined by the social base of the party. The Irish middle class feared a new plunge into disorder and civil strife, so the government concentrated on keeping the ship of state stable. Thier election campaigns were fought on a platform of firm government, and they produced an election poster which captured the mood of the Irish middle classes exactly: under the picture of a black figure with extended revolver they promised to dispel the shadow of the **gunman**.



For this strategy to be in any way successful it was necessary that some changes be made in the North, both as a way of clearing the ground of some historical encumbrances, and to make it easier for Fianna Fail to sell the new deal to its electorate. For these reasons Britain began to apply pressure on the Northern administration to tone down some of the worst sectarian abuses, and to make friendly noises to the Southern government. It was this policy which led Captain O'Neill to hop on a train to Dublin, and meet Sean Lemass, in a return visit after the latter had visited Belfast.

#### Crisis in the Unionist Party

But politicians can only move as fast as their political bases. Most Northern Unionists have never really believed the sectarian nonsense they used to keep their support, and they could dispense with it a lot more easily than their supporters. But there are important elements in the Party who accept the main lines of Unionist mythology, and there are still others who, although agnostic, are not prepared to risk dispensing with it. Thus although the British ruling class were prepared to alter radically the Irish settlement, and the leading sections of the Unionists were prepared to collaborate, the Unionist party itself constituted a barrier on the road. And yet without the Unionist Party there could not be any stable advance, there was no other political party in the Six Counties, the opposition Nationalists were a discredited group of individuals, the Labour Party had derisory electoral support, and there was neither the prospect of some new political formation appearing, nor chance of success if it did.

This dictated a pace of advance which was painfully slow, and which would constantly make concessions to whichever section of the community was putting the main pressure on at any given time. But despite all their best efforts it was impossible to maintain stability, and impossible to reconcile the divisions within the Northern state; impossible in other words to come to a capitalist solution of the Irish problem.

#### Change and Decay

There had been some important changes within the Catholic community in the six counties. Welfare benefits, applied on a British, i.e. non-discriminatory basis had made life much easier for the catholic unemployed. A catholic middle class began to develop. Within the institutions of higher education a British situation also existed. All of these assisted in giving the Catholics a new self-confidence. With the Lemass/O'Neill talks it seemed that basic change was at last on its way. For the first time in fifty years the Northern minority lifted their heads. It was this which brought them behind the Civil Rights movement; the initial moderation of the CRA demands was just the right temperature, once they got into the water of political actions, and they never looked back.

The Protestants on the other hand were dealt a series of stunning blows. Their Prime Minister had gone to talk to the Pope's man in

Dublin, the papists at home were being allowed to get unprecedentedly uppity, and the RUC and 'B' Specials were now being criticised for what they had always been praised for doing in the past. With the proposed 'reforms' which would bring the Catholic middle class into effective political life in the Province, their despair was complete.

Thus the Unionist monolith shattered. Although the most publicised aspect of this is the rise of the good Doctor Paisley, the fact is that the disintegration has been on a very localised basis, and this has created a multiplicity of fragments each capable of taking initiatives. Of course politicians like Paisley and others have used this upsurge to gain a place in Six County politics, but they have ridden on the top of the elemental discontent; they neither called it into being nor lead it. This further complicates the situation, since despite their anxiety, and the willingness of British imperialism to give them a good price, they cannot sell this movement into some compromise solution.

Having created the situation, British imperialism has since been steadily back tracking. A bad Unionist government is better than no government at all and their strategy since August '69 has been to preserve the government at all costs. Thus we reach the situation of today; having introduced internment, and finally broken the minority away from all allegiance to the Six County state, the only way that they can save the situation is by a pitiless war, which will re-create the old basis of stability: a passive defeated Catholic minority.





26 Members of PD stage a sit-down strike outside the City Hall at the start of the Civil Rights Campaign in October 9, 1968.

## 5. Republicanism

---

The best indication of the depth of the change which has swept over Ireland in the last four years is the crisis which has shaken practically every political formation North and South, its sharpest point being August '69. The next three chapters analyse these organisations; with the exception of the Unionist Party, which has probably been explained sufficiently in the preceding text. In any case the Unionist Party's crisis stems more properly from the O'Neil/Lemass talks, and there is very little which can be added except that the prime factor is the tendency of the Unionist Party to disintegrate the nearer 'reform' in the Six Counties is approached. It is in fact this earlier crisis of the Unionist Party which contributed to the rise of the Civil Rights movement, and thus the situation which plunged the other organisations into crisis.

### The Origins of Republicanism

We have seen how the rise of the Presbyterian bourgeoisie in the North East created a new kind of political movement, The Society of United Irishmen, which put Irish nationalism for the first time on a rational secular political basis. The credo of the United Irishmen, as expressed by Wolfe Tone, is as fresh and relevant today, as the day it was written:

"To subvert the tyranny of our execrable Government, to break the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country—these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant Catholic and Dissenter—these were my means".

This truly revolutionary statement is the basis for everything progressive in Ireland since that date. From the United Irishmen onwards, although the form of Irish identity could be catholic, it could never develop its content without breaking from the religious confines and taking the fight into the realm of modern rational politics.

With the rise of Young Ireland, Davis re-introduced the demand of Tone, separation as the only possible relationship between Ireland and England. Lalor gave Irish nationalism a new base, which made it a nationwide force capable of taking on the British empire—the land question; by linking this with the demand for separation he changed the relationship of forces entirely and created the basis for the modern Irish nationalist tradition. Fenianism. Mitchell extended the support for the Irish struggle by holding out a hand to the Chartists in Britain.

#### The Ownership of Ireland

But, from the foundation of Fenianism, the concepts of Tone and 'Young Ireland' were never developed. Padraig Pearse systematised the ideas of the great leaders of the Irish nation, as a means of establishing the continuity of the twin basic concepts of the Easter Rising; separation, and the ownership of Ireland by the people of Ireland. He established the latter point as one of the continuous demands of Irish nationalism. His last work, 'The Sovereign People', as its title suggests, is the most important from this standpoint. In it Pearse said "Let no man be mistaken as to who will be lord in Ireland when Ireland is free. The people will be lord and master".

But although in the writings of the Feinians the great democratic ideal of popular control is constantly reiterated, finding one of its noblest expressions in the Proclamation of The Irish Republic of 1916, "We declare the right of the Irish people to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible"; this, the last statement of Fenianism before its most glorious achievement, underlines the problem of the Fenian concept. Nowhere is the content of popular control defined, nowhere is the exact way in which the Irish people will exercise their control clarified.

#### Connolly and Fenianism

The streams of Fenianism and Connolly/Marxism met at Easter but they did not merge. Connolly's concepts were to have little effect on the Fenians, and the Easter Rising spent the force of his supporters. Had he been able to win the Fenians to his programme Irish history might have been very different. As it was, Republicanism from the Easter Rising on was constantly frustrated by its lack of a clear perspective. This facilitated the infiltration of the reactionary middle class elements who took over in 1922.

The question is often posed as to whether it would have been better for Connolly to have built a working class movement, instead of going to certain death in the Rising. This argument misses the point, for if the path to working class power in Ireland lay through the victory of the national struggle then it was essential that a blow in that struggle be struck during the war. And if it was to be struck, then Labour had to participate. Any other course would have been to condemn the national movement to Redmond, and the Labour movement to political bankruptcy.

#### The Workers and Fenianism

Connolly was always very conscious of the need to fuse the currents of Fenianism and working class Marxism, he knew that Fenianism had deep influence over the best of the workers, and if the Labour Movement was to be relevant it had to appeal to them in Fenian terms. This can be understood if we examine the structure of the Irish working class. Because of Ireland's industrial development the working class was small and newly hewed off from the peasantry, and the fact that the Irish Transport and General Workers Union was its mass expression speaks volumes for the type of industries which predominated. In 1909 the Dublin Medical Officer of Health divided the population of the City up as follows:

Professional and Independent	... ..	17,500
Middle	... ..	87,000
Artisans and petty shopkeepers	... ..	110,500
Hawkers Porters Labourers etc.	... ..	90,000

It was out of the last category that the ITGWU was formed.

A comparison with Russia underlines the point: the Russian working class at that period was similar, it was a minority of the population, and had its roots in the peasantry, but it was concentrated in huge, modern enterprises, where it had an economic and political power out of all proportion to its size. The Irish working class was engaged in small enterprises, it was fragmented, and it was not able to participate in the kind of disciplined large scale production which give it clear sense of class identity, and weld it into a powerful force. Peasants, leaving the countryside to work in such small scale enterprises, did not experience a sharp enough break in their working experience to make them feel the need for a new revolutionary ideology. Fenianism was broad and ill-defined enough to adapt to the new circumstances, and radical enough to express their anger and frustration. In addition the weak ideology of syndicalism made it immediately acceptable, and it co-existed very naturally with Fenianism. Thus the general consciousness of the best and most militant workers was a mixture of syndicalism and Fenianism. This is of prime importance for understanding modern Republicanism. We saw how the Land Acts and rural de-population had leaked away a great deal of the revolutionary potential in the countryside, and although the small farmers remained and are to this day an important force within Irish society, nevertheless if by the beginning of the 20th

century the national movement had been based entirely on them it would have been impotent. The urban workers, artisans and petit-bourgeoisie formed a large proportion of the Irish Volunteers, and the fact that the Rising took place in Dublin and met no immediate response from the countryside underlines the change which had occurred.

#### Left Republicanism

The division between the Free Staters and the Republicans was, formally, over an abstraction, the oath: but it was in reality a division between the most conservative elements in the national movement, and the most radical. Liam Mellows, before being shot by the Free State, wrote a number of letters in which he stressed the need for the Republic to base itself on the working class. But there was no possibility during the Black and Tan or Civil Wars for the Republicans to sit down and discuss re-directing their struggle; and afterwards they were defeated and demoralised. That defeat meant that for nearly fifty years Republicanism was fighting for what it had lost yesterday, and not what it must win tomorrow.

Nevertheless, there was constant evidence of the radicalising influence of Republicanism. In 1929 a Republican political organisation called Saor Eire\* (Free Ireland) was organised with the support of a number of IRA members; it was explicitly socialist and directed propaganda to workers and small farmers, but it did not have a deep influence within the IRA, which remained non, if not anti-political. Another venture around the same time with a wider range of political support, Comhairle na Poblachta (Republican Council) also had a left orientation. Then in 1934 the Republican Congress was formed, which split the IRA but was the most effective voice in left politics in Ireland for a whole period, playing a particularly important role in beating the fascist Blueshirts off the streets in the mid-thirties. This tendency to throw up radical currents appeared again when a group of leftists in Dublin split from the IRA to link up with an independent group in the North, Saor Uladh (Free Ulster) and initiated the 1956-62 campaign.

It is as one more step in the struggle to win the Republican movement to a socialist perspective that we must view the changes which took place within the Movement after 1962. The failure of the '56-'62 campaign led to a deepgoing discussion within the leadership of the IRA. Their conclusions are best expressed by Cathal Goulding:

"The people had no real knowledge of our objectives, they didn't understand our tactics or our motives, if they didn't understand us they couldn't be with us. Without the support of the majority of the people, we just couldn't succeed.

\*Not to be confused with the present day Saor Eire

"The question was; how could we get the people to support us? The evidence was that the Republican Movement had no real policies. Without objectives, we couldn't develop a proper strategy. Tactics were all that we had employed. The actual fight for freedom had become an end in itself for us. Instead of a means it became an end. We had not planned to achieve the freedom of Ireland. We simply planned to fight for the freedom of Ireland. We could never hope to succeed because we never planned to succeed.

"The answer was plain; we would have to establish our objectives; to explain these to our own movement; to persuade our movement to accept them; to bring them to the people and explain them—and then to show the people, by our initial political and agitational activities that we were sincere. We would have to declare what kind of government, what kind of state we wanted in Ireland. We would then have to show the people by propaganda, education and action, why this type of state would be beneficial to them—that it would mean more bread and butter, better wages, better housing conditions, more education and a better life for everyone.

"Our first objective then was to involve ourselves in the everyday problems of people; to organise them to demand better houses, better working conditions, better jobs, better pay, better education—to develop agitational activities along these lines. By doing this we felt that we could involve the people, not so much in supporting the Republican Movement for our political ends but in supporting agitation so that they themselves would be part of a revolutionary force demanding what the present system just couldn't produce."<sup>1</sup>

#### Two Influences

There were in fact two forces at work. One was the Goulding group of the leadership, who developed a rather "populist" outlook, and got the IRA and Sinn Fein involved in supporting strikers, assisting squatters in Dublin etc. etc. But they were influenced by a group of intellectuals around the Dublin Wolfe Tone Society, based on Trinity College. The main ideologues of this were Anthony Coughlin, and Dr. Roy Johnson. They in turn had been influenced by C. Desmond Greaves of the British Communist Party, and the Connolly Association.

The influence of the Wolfe Tone Society people, in particular of Roy Johnson, was contradictory. On the one hand they helped to clear away some of the traditional encumbrances of Republican ideology, and to clarify for a large number of Republicans the main tenets of Marxism. But they also introduced a concept of revolutionary strategy which is similar in methodology to the "British Road to Socialism", and which poses the struggle in Ireland as being one of 'stages'. The political implications of this will be discussed later.

<sup>1</sup> Interview in 'This Week', re-published in 'New Left Review' No. 64, Nov/Dec. 1970.

## The Split

This attempt to change the course of the Republican movement resulted in a split, which requires a good deal of explanation, particularly since the reasons for it, and the nature of both sections, have been confused by polemics from every side.

The crisis within the Movement was the result of three factors, which although related have a degree of independence.

Factor 1) Socialism; although the perspective of an Irish Workers Republic was adopted before the split, and both sides proclaim it, a good number of people within the movement were deeply suspicious of the move to the left, while others were socialists, but opposed the Wolfe Tone Society influence from an anti-Stalinist, and/or ultra-left standpoint. Others dropped out silently, while a large portion of the base of Republican sympathy remained politically non-socialist.

Factor 2) Abstentionism; the leadership proposed to change the old Republican electoral policy, which involved putting up candidates who would refuse to take their seats if elected. By this means the Republicans encouraged the people to demonstrate their rejection of Westminster, Stormont or the Free State Dail. The new policy would mean that candidates, if elected, would take their seats and use parliament, in the Leninist sense, as a forum for revolutionary propaganda. This was passed by the Army Convention, precipitating a split in the Army, and later the split was carried over to Sinn Fein. The split section of the Army called itself the Provisional Army Council, and it was supported by the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Fein. Thus the split was formally over the question of abstentionism.

Factor 3) Military; The transition from solely military, to military and political activity created big strains within the IRA. Military training, looking after arms dumps, and the security precautions associated with an underground army are extremely time consuming. To impose political activity on an army which was small and dwindling simply meant a run down on military activity. In addition people involved in sales of the 'United Irishman', or work connected with the many Republican campaigns would immediately be known by the police, which would reduce their future effectiveness for military work. There was resistance to this inside the Army, and some volunteers left. The leadership, however, not seeing any imminent need for a military campaign staked everything on making a political breakthrough, but when in August '69 the Falls was seen to be inadequately armed; the shock waves rocked the credibility of the leadership. It is doubtful whether the IRA would have been more prepared if the traditional policies had remained in force, but it was relatively easy for the feeling to grow that the IRA had been "run down" deliberately, and from this to the idea that the people of the Falls had been 'betrayed' was a short step. For these reasons the split cannot be understood in the 'left/right' terms common to European politics, the determinant factor in choosing sides was not Marxism, or non-Marxism, but attachment to the old 'physical

force' tradition of Republicanism. When it is understood that this is the real polarity, it can be understood also why both sides contain a very wide range of political ideas ranging from right to left.

This also means that it is difficult to credit one side with a monopoly of revolutionary potential. By forcing the question of Socialism, the present leaders of the Officials moved the whole debate within Republicanism, over to the left, so much so that opponents of Socialism within the Provisionals do not fight on that ground, they simply define socialism in a non-socialist way.

But on the other hand, the strategy of the Provisionals has made it impossible for British imperialism to consolidate the Stormont administration, and therefore to get the basis for a deal which would bring them closer to their long term objectives; it is not likely that the strategy of the Officials would have had the same effect.

## The Verdict

The verdict on the split must be that it was the wrong split at the wrong time, over the wrong issues, involving the wrong people. And if the Republican movement is to go forward it cannot be in terms of the artificial political division which now exists. The military 'failure' of August 1969 has made it all too easy to present Marxist and Socialist Republicans as people who want to disarm the IRA. The pressure of the Provisionals has pushed the Officials further towards the kind of rigid and reformist strategy of the Wolfe Tone Society and has tended to polarise all sections of the Officials around this strategy, rather than permitting the development of a discussion which would raise questions about it. The pressure of the military tasks has prevented any calling of the right wing elements to account by the large number of sincere revolutionary socialists within the Provisionals.

## Political Programme

The most important test of any revolutionary movement is its political programme, and we must therefore examine the programme of both sections; there are some important differences, between them but the most striking thing is that both suffer from the same weaknesses. The Provisionals have issued a rounded out social and economic programme 'Eire Nua' (New Ireland) but the Officials have produced nothing which compares with this in scope. This is simply because 'Eire Nua' is a programme which was drafted and under discussion before the split, and the present leadership of the Officials, which was then in the leadership of the movement as a whole, was dissatisfied with it and wished to draft an alternative. So far the Officials have produced only a short document 'Republican Freedom Manifesto for the Seventies', and various keynote articles in their paper "The United Irishman", and statements issued from time to time by the Official Army Council and the Ard Comhairle (executive council) of Sinn Fein.

The following extracts from 'Eire Nua' will give an idea of the concepts which it advances:

- 1) The wealth of Ireland belongs to the people of Ireland and is theirs to be exploited and developed in their interests.
- 2) To ensure justice for all, the means of production, distribution and exchange must be controlled by the people and administered democratically.
- 3) Finance, insurance and all key industries must be brought under state control. The principle agent of major development in industry, agriculture and fisheries must be the state.
- 4) The state will have the complete control over the import and export of money.
- 5) Apart from the sectors mentioned above, the main instrument of economic development will be co-operative enterprises in production, distribution and exchange. These will be based on the Comhar na gComharsan (neighbours' co-operation) philosophy, which is founded on the right of worker ownership and is native Irish as well as being co-operative or distributive in character. Each individual worker will own an economic unit of the means of production in the form of farm workshop business or share in a factory or other co-operative. Credit Unions will play an important role in this type of development.
- 7) Private enterprise will still have a role to play in the economy but it will be a much smaller role than it has today. It will have no place in key industries and state incentives will favour co-operative projects as the most socially desirable. No non-national shall be allowed to have a controlling interest in an Irish industry.
- 10) Pending the achievement of national independence of all 32 counties, an Economic Resistance Movement will be built up to defend the interests of the Irish people against exploitation whether from foreign takeovers or native gombeen capitalism; and to promote the Comhar na gComharsan philosophy. Efforts to push us into the Common Market will be resisted and a demand will be made for the revoking of the Free Trade Agreement with England."

When a section from the Official's "Freedom Manifesto" is quoted the similarities will be obvious

"We stand for an independent all-Ireland Republic with the whole wealth of the nation under the democratic control of the people the use of State power to disposses all foreign financiers, monopolists, landlords and their native collaborators; the transfer of all large-scale productive units in industry, commerce and finance to democratic council representative of the people concerned whether as workers, suppliers or consumers in proportion appropriate to their interests.

"We consider that the natural interests of the small business coincide with its market the working people, rather than with its exploiters, the monopolists and foreign speculators. We therefore undertake to defend the interests of the small business and to encourage co-operative democratic rationalisation, arranged by mutual consent in the interests of price and cost reduction rather than monopolistic rationalisations imposed from above.

"We hold that the working farmer is the natural ally of the urban worker, and that the interests of the farmer must be protected by the State helping him to organise co-operatively to control his supplies and his marketing. We hold that the English imposed State structure should be dismantled and a new one built closer to the peoples' needs, the lowest level being easily accessible to everyone, with federation into regional authorities with substantial resources and real governmental powers such as to be able to react sympathetically and rapidly to local needs; central government to be concerned with security, defence and long-term co-ordination of the regional budgets."

Both of these programmes bear the hall-marks of traditional Irish liberal thinking, which extended the concepts of rural co-operativism to the urban industrial context. The Provisionals programme explicitly propounds the concepts of Distributism, i.e. the concept of spreading ownership and control of the means of production amongst those engaged in production. The Officials adapt them to a more clearly socialist model. The implications are more important than a superficial glance would reveal. Their blind spot is the key question of the state: i.e. the re-modelling of capitalist society through the centralised mechanism of a state which is based on the workers and small farmers, and which prevents the possibility of resistance to the new order by hostile class forces. For the Republicans, Socialism will be built from the base up, transforming political social and economic relations as it develops.

#### Strategy and the State

This in turn determines the strategy for achieving socialism, fostering the conviction that national and social liberation can grow up from the grass roots within the shell of capitalist, and imperialist domination. This is natural to a movement which only in recent history moved into the towns from the countryside, which is based on a working class which bears the marks of the history we have discussed, and which has fought in a situation where the native state power has always been rather weak.

An article in the 'United Irishman' of May 1971 shows that the Officials are beginning to grapple with this problem, but as yet inadequately. The article, by Sean Garland (one of the ablest physical force revolutionaries in the '56-62 struggle) underlines the importance of the development of popular struggles and organisations at the base of society, but talks of the question of state power thus:

"The central point of any revolution, and particularly in a socialist revolution is that the key positions in the State, in Government, Army, Police, Civil Service, Judiciary, Unions and many National Organisations, TV, Radio and Press should pass out of the hands of those who are loyal to the Establishment and into the hands of those who represent the vast majority of the people who will use this power to build socialism where the means of production distribution and exchange are socially owned."

The classical Marxist and Leninist standpoint is that the old state must be smashed and that the alternative structures which are thrown up by the struggle against the old regime must take its place; Garland's formulation gives the impression that it is simply a question of penetrating the old state with supporters of a new order. The document 'Ireland Today' which laid the basis for the Official's decision to adopt a participationist policy contains the following paragraph which echoes this concept:

"Relationship with the state machine to be based on the assumption that the latter is often composed of men of good will constrained by a foreign structure; flaws in the structure to be sought and exploited by organising a co-ordinated attack both in the assembly and from the mass organisations concerned."

These concepts follow the methodology of the 'British Road to Socialism', which sees the role of mass struggle as supporting the struggle in Parliament to re-shape the capitalist state, neutralising attempts by the ruling class to oppose this change, and forming the channels through which the individuals imposing the change at the top mobilise the people. This giving of a secondary role to the mass struggle, and the separation of organisations which it creates, from the central role in creating the revolution, is the well-spring of the British Communist Party's reformism, and adaptation to the conservatised bureaucracy within the working class movement. Its introduction into the Republican Movement would seriously hamper the struggle in Ireland.

To be fair, it is possible to select quotes which will give a quite opposite slant to the ideas of the Officials, what we are saying is not that these concepts are the totality of their thinking but that their co-existence with more revolutionary ideas shows an ideological weakness and the possibility that such ideas could increase their influence, weakening the revolutionary potential of the movement.

## Historical Role

Criticisms of Republicanism must be weighed against its historic role in focussing the resistance of the Irish people to the 1922 settlement, and its continuity from the whole tradition of Tone, Young Ireland, the Fenians and the 1916 rising; in other words that strand of Irish nationalism which consistently set the liberation of Ireland above the immediate interests of any section of the men of property, and for whom this liberation was meaningless unless it also meant the liberation of the men of no property. No revolutionary movement in Ireland can cut itself off from this tradition, and no new revolutionary movement can be built in abstraction from it. The Irish working class, as we have shown, provided a new base for Fenianism in the towns. Since then at the start of this century the working class has developed tremendously both in size and class-consciousness. But despite a superficial movement towards the Labour Party, Fenianism has not been displaced as the most important revolutionary trend within the working class, and since the tasks of the Irish workers include the consummation of the programme of the revolution which failed in 1916, Republicanism will continue to be a force. But the important change since Connolly's day is that the possibility exists for Republicanism to base itself much more firmly on the working class, and to integrate working class revolutionary ideas—Marxism—into its thinking. A fusion between revolutionary Marxism and Republicanism is the future for the Irish revolutionary movement.

## Saor Eire

Alongside the Officials and Provisionals exists a much smaller group which represents just such a fusion between Marxism and Republicanism—Saor Eire (Free Ireland). SE was formed out of two distinct strands, a group of volunteers who left the IRA during the period of politicisation (they reacted against the rundown of military activity, and the influence of the Wolfe Tone Society) and former members of the Irish Workers Group, a Trotskyist organisation which split up in the late sixties. Behind Saor Eire's activities is the conviction that no change can be promoted within the Republican Movement unless it is pressurised by a more militant and active military organisation. This approach contains a great deal of truth, for the launching of a struggle in 1956 by Saor Uladh catapulted the main body of the IRA into the Border Campaign, and forced the leadership of the IRA down off its conservative pedestal. Despite the failures of that campaign, the fact that it was fought faced a new generation of Irish men and women with the imperative challenge of the oppression of their nation; that new generation brought into the struggle the forces which today have opened up a new chapter in the political development of the Irish Revolutionary Movement.

But Saor Eire has been caught in the same trap as the leaders of the Officials in the mid-sixties—the contradiction between political and military activity. The need for a secret military organisation has

eliminated any but the most token open political work. The sum total of Saor Eire's political contribution has been one interview in 'The Red Mole', and a short manifesto, also published in the 'Mole'. It has also meant that the group was formed on a rather vague political basis, and the pressing necessity of military action has made it even more difficult to hammer out a coherent political position.

The political restrictions on SE have in turn restricted its military activities, and so far it has been publicly known mainly for bank robberies. Without a stronger political content SE will not draw towards itself the kind of young revolutionaries who could make a military organisation a viable alternative to the two Republican Armies, and SE will remain a group respected for its courage and militancy but essentially marginal to the Irish struggle.

## 6. The Political Left

---

Alongside the Republican movement exist a number of socialist organisations which are political, without being involved in military struggle. Leaving aside the Labour Parties, which we will examine together with the bourgeois political parties, these groups are extremely small and have at best a slight influence, however they could play a key role in the creation of an Irish revolutionary vanguard.

### The Roots of the Revolutionary Left

In 1966 a new initiative on the Irish left was launched, a newspaper, the 'Irish Militant' was published as the voice of the Irish Workers Group. The IWG was Trotskyist, and it was in sympathy with the Fourth International, but it was politically quite heterogeneous. It is not the purpose of this pamphlet to rake over the ashes of the IWG, so it will avoid taking sides on the question of whether the development of the struggle in Ireland could have drawn the various strands of the group together, or whether it would have been better to build a group on a clearer political basis. The fact is that the IWG suffered a bitter split towards the end of 1968, and the forces which it had drawn together fragmented, and went in different directions. But former members of the IWG, played a decisive role in the events from the inception of the Civil Rights struggle to the crisis of August 1969. It was Eamonn McCann, a former editor of the 'Irish Militant' who was the moving spirit behind the Civil Rights march in Derry on October 5th, 1968. The Young Socialist Alliance created by former IWG members, in Queens University, Belfast was instrumental in creating the Peoples Democracy, which under the leadership of IWG 'old boys' Michael Farrell, Cyril Toman, et al, drove forward the Civil Rights struggle at a time when the leadership of the CRA had been persuaded to hang back in order to give O'Neil a

chance to convince the Unionist Party. It was this which prevented British Imperialism from stabilising the situation.

Had the IWG been a viable, strong Trotskyist organisation, which had gone through an internal political development, and created out of its string of able individuals a firm cadre force, the face of political events might have been very different.

#### The Peoples Democracy

The PD was created out of the initial response of the Queens University students to the October 5th events. As part of the reform programme the Unionists had already permitted a 'British' type higher education structure to be created in the Six Counties. Within Queens religious discrimination was merely a grim shadow of the world outside, a generation of young catholics went through a non-discriminatory education, and a generation of young protestants were educated alongside them. The sudden horrifying reality of Northern Ireland caught up with this generation on October 5th, 1968. In protest at the attack on the Civil Rights demonstration in Derry, 2,000 students marched from Queens University to the City Hall, but were blocked by a crowd of 50 Paisleyites who proved an immovable obstacle for the RUC. Following this experience, the Peoples Democracy was born, in the type of intense, endless and all-embracing discussion which marked the emergence of student vanguard after student vanguard in the sixties, and has been the means by which they moved from a recoil against the reality of society, a thorough critique of society, to action.

By mobilising this force, the political leaders of the PD (mainly as we have noted ex-members of the IWG) were able to force the pace of the Civil Rights struggle. But the limitations of a student vanguard were even more obvious in the Six Counties than elsewhere. The students were a tiny section of the population. Incapable of precipitating any decisive change in the balance of forces within the society, their role could be decisive only for a short, and essentially artificial period. August '69 saw the development of an entirely different situation, born on the barricades of Derry and Belfast.

#### Errors

Even if its leadership had understood its imminence, the PD could hardly have been prepared for the abruptness of the ending of this period. As it was they had adapted to the pre-August situation and had seen the locus of the struggle solely within the Six-counties. This led to two grave political errors. The ultimate role of British imperialism in creating the sectarianism and oppression in the Northern state was ignored, and along with it the need to see the Civil Rights struggle as one more chapter in the unfolding struggle against the partition of Ireland. Indeed Michael Farrell for a time expressed the conviction that there could be no re-unification of Ireland until there had been a socialist revolution in both parts. In

turn this playing down of the national question and blindness to the need for a 32 county strategy, posed the overwhelming problem of the Protestant workers. If there is going to be a socialist revolution in the six-counties then there is no question of it succeeding without the protestant workers participating, ergo the pre-condition for the revolution is the winning over of the protestant workers. This was seen at first as the transference of the militancy of the catholic workers on the question of jobs, housing, and civil rights, to the Protestant workers. This dictated a demonstrable non-sectarianism, which even resulted in Farrell advising PD demonstrators not to respond to physical attacks from Protestant counter-demonstrators. Another grave error which resulted from this was the wrong analysis of the forces ranged on the other side of the class barriers. The Unionists were seen as the main enemy, and the role of British imperialism obscured; thus PD's position on the intervention of British troops was at best equivocal, and they did little or nothing to warn the minority that the troops would eventually be used against them in the event of the minority threatening the status quo—it was only after July '70 that PD took up the stand of calling for their withdrawal.

All of this meant that in August '69, despite a credible role in the defence of the Bogside, the PD was shunted into a siding of Irish history. Its size declined rapidly, and it began to conform more to the pattern of a vanguard political group, rather than a mass student movement. Indeed before long it was to lose any foothold in Queens. Politically it boiled down to an alliance between the Trotskyist influenced elements, and Anarchists and near-Anarchists. During this fallow period the PD's only activities of note were the regular production of a biting little newspaper *Free Citizen*, a campaign against fares increases on Belfast corporation transport, and support for the eel fishermen of Lough Neagh. Attempts were continually made to get through to the protestant workers, and just as continually they failed. But the PD did not stand still ideologically. They began to absorb some of the lessons of the struggle and of their experience. By the middle of 1970 sections of them had cast off a good deal of their rigid opposition to the national struggle; they saw the need for a 32 county revolutionary organisation, and although they met with no success in creating a PD in the 26 counties, they did support the Socialist Labour Alliance (of which more later) to the end of creating a 32 county movement.

#### P.D. Now

Since the introduction of internment the PD has shown its determination to get back into the struggle. Accepting the fact that this means working solely within the catholic working class at present, they have gone into the ghettos to help build the civil resistance campaign, attempting to link up the civil resistance committees from street to street, and town to town, to create the fabric of a new social order. They have adopted a flexible policy of working locally with the



Republicans, which means that from place to place they ally with the Officials or the Provisionals, whichever is in the lead in the given area.

The PD can play a valuable role, especially since the links which it has built with the Republicans have helped to offset the political weaknesses of Republicanism. Provided it is able to clarify not only its past failures, but the methodological roots of those failures, it will contribute to the development of a revolutionary leadership in Ireland. A note of caution must be sounded. A policy statement by Mike Farrell in a recent issue of *Unfree Citizen* (the PDs paper since internment) having analysed correctly the necessity of working within the civil resistance struggle, poses the present strategy as one of gaining the maximum possible reforms within the Six Country context. The reason given for this is to avoid confronting the protestant workers too sharply, in the hope that a reformed Northern Ireland would erode their sectarianism, bringing them into a socialist struggle.

Such a separation between the immediate struggles and the national struggle would be a very bad mistake because if the Civil resistance movement created the basis for sweeping the border away, before the Protestant workers had been weaned from their counter-revolutionary ideology it inevitably would leave PD in a reformist position. Farrell's analysis appears not to take this possibility into account. We shall explain later why we think that this is not only a possibility, but the most probable variant in the present situation.

#### The League for a Workers Republic

After the split in the Irish Workers Group, a fragment in Dublin kept together, working mainly within the Labour Party, and an independent youth organisation the Young Socialists. The League for a Workers Republic, as it called itself, was small, but it had a key position within the left milieu around the Labour Party in Dublin. It was able to do serious work in building the YS, becoming the main political influence within it, and it was able for a time to build contacts with car-assembly workers in Dundalk (a town near the border).

The trouble with the LWR was not that it was small, and confined to the, essentially atypical, Dublin political scene, but that it did not begin to understand the enormous barriers which this represented for the growth of Irish Trotskyism, and contented itself with a low level propaganda activity. Its attitude to Republicanism has been especially reprehensible. It never carried out a serious theoretical study, but dismissed the question with a few propaganda phrases. It was thus totally unprepared for the upsurge of Republicanism following July 1970, and was caught in an orientation to the Labour Party when that Party crossed the class lines, and forced all genuine left elements out. Any theoretical work which the LWR carried out was the result of pressure from the ICO, and they have tended to pursue modified versions of the ICO's analyses, e.g. the 'two nationalities' theory.

This weakness was the result of the LWR's international isolationism. Without being part of an international they could not grasp the breadth

of Trotskyist practice, or learn from the theoretical debates within the movement. Their Trotskyism was based on a British model, and an outdated one at that. At first they had close links with the 'Workers Fight' tendency in Britain, which had also originated within the IWG, but following the entry of 'Workers Fight' into the International Socialists these links became attenuated. Given the expulsion of 'Workers Fight' from IS, it is possible that new links could be established again. For a time the LWR stirred up an interest in the question of the Fourth International, and accepted the need to become part of a world movement. But the discussion did not centre around trying to understand what internationalism meant, it was simply a matter of drawing up a balance sheet with the pluses and minuses of the F.I. matched against each other. Over a period of about a year a majority of the membership either left or were expelled, becoming the basis for the new Irish Section of the Fourth International. The rump which is left is painfully balanced between the contradiction of accepting the political method, and most of the political positions of the SLL in Britain, but being reluctant to become organisationally linked with them. They echo all of the Healyite slanders about the Fourth International, as a political basis for not joining, but base their separation from Healy solely on the basis of the SLL's 'political thuggery'.

The LWR too has been by-passed, and its future as an organisation is very much in question.

#### The League for a Workers Vanguard: A product of the death-agony of Healyism

Even the submissive leadership of the LWR was too independent for Gerry Healy, and he split off a couple of LWR members in the summer of 1970, who with a small number of YS members formed the LWV as the 'Irish Section of the International Committee of the Fourth International', with the Irish Young Socialists as its youth organisation. This then linked up with one or two SLL members in the North. It is the most irrelevant tendency in Irish politics, since its only purpose is to provide Healy with another 'section' to add to his list of rapidly diminishing supporters. Its political practice consists of selling the Workers Press, and propaganda which slavishly follows the themes which the SLL is pushing in Britain. The LWV has not grown, and has been eroded to a point where it seems certain that it will become extinct in the near future.

#### The Irish Section of the Fourth International

The lessons of the inadequacy of the Irish revolutionary left have been drawn by a small number of militants in Ireland; the nucleus of a sympathising section of the Fourth International now exists. Its forces have mainly been drawn from the disintegration of the LWR, but it has begun to win adherents from a wider range of political backgrounds. It is at present focussed in Dublin and Belfast, with the Belfast grouping consisting of a small number of young people who have been attracted by the politics of The Red Mole, which has been on sale there for some time. The very fact that it

begins with forces on either side of the border is important in a situation where other groups are confined to one or other of the two states. The ground work in building the group was done by Peter Graham, an ex-member of the LWR who moved to London in the spring of 1970 and through experience of the British political scene decided to join the IMG. In the early summer of 1971 he returned to Ireland to draw together the forces of the new Irish section. Initially he set up the Marxist Discussion Group, which began to lay the groundwork for a Marxist analysis of Irish political problems. The MDG, although not a structured political group, because of the superiority of its political ideas it soon became the main political influence within the Young Socialists in Dublin. This meant that when internment was introduced in the North the YS was able to play a part in the solidarity action in the 26 counties; had the LWR been determining events they would have stood idly by.

The group and the Fourth International as a whole suffered a severe blow in October 1971 when Peter Graham was assassinated in Dublin. At the time of writing neither his murderers, nor the reason for his death are known; but in killing him they deprived the Irish working class of an exceptionally able and dedicated leader, who was beginning to show promise of the much greater contribution he could have made. But far from demoralising the FI supporters in Ireland, Peter's death has made them more determined than ever to build a section. They are confident that the next world congress of the FI will recognise them as a fully fledged section. We are confident that when the history of Irish Trotskyism is written, it will record that the Irish Section of the Fourth International played the key role in creating the Republican/Marxist leadership of the Irish revolution.

#### The Young Socialists

Not to be confused with the SLL's youth movement, which in Ireland is called the Irish Young Socialists. The YS was set up in 1968 on the initiative of the LWR, it brought together a number of small independent left-wing youth groups around Dublin, its main architect was Peter Graham. Its initial activity was within the Labour Party, and it tried to become recognised as the LP's official youth movement, without success. During the fight within the LP over the coalition issue the YS was a key part of the opposition; when the LP took the decision in favour of a coalition the YS withdrew.

Since Peter Graham's return to Ireland, there has been a sharp political struggle within the YS between the LWR and the supporters of the Fourth International. This has led to the FI supporters taking control of the Dublin Regional Committee, which represents a majority of the members of the YS. The most important result has been the way in which the YS came off the fence, and got involved in solidarity work for those fighting in the North. It has also been the centre of solidarity with Saor Eire prisoners.

#### The Socialist Labour Alliance

The SLA was created out of the resistance by left-wingers within the Irish Labour Party to the policy of acceptance in principle of a coalition with Fine Gael. A group of delegates walked out of the Cork conference and set up the SLA, two conferences were later called to create a united front organisation involving all the Socialist and Republican organisations. The purposes of such a united front were rather vague, but the SLA could have played a valuable role in linking up Marxists, Republicans and the ex-LPers, creating a 32 county movement. Unfortunately the number of people who actually left the LP was rather small, and neither of the main Republican organisations was interested in the SLA. It has been limited to a rather loose alliance of PD, the LWR, Saor Eire, the YS, the Fourth International, the ex-LPers, and individual socialists/Republicans.

#### Irish Stalinism

As an independent force, apart from its influence within the Official Republican Movement, Irish Stalinism is not powerful force, but a critique of it draws out some of the most important lessons of the Irish revolutionary struggle.

#### The Communist Party of Ireland

Like the other Communist Parties the Irish CP's politics were crippled by the Stalinisation of the Comintern. Moreover it faced the longest drawn out anti-communist campaign in the world. Ireland pre-saged McCarthyism by a few decades, and deep hostility to communism, fostered by the Catholic church, lasted long after the voluble senator had been transformed into an anathema elsewhere. It was able to work closely with the Republican Congress for a time, but was neither able to overcome suspicion within the Republican Movement nor to pose as a viable alternative to the Congress. Following the collapse of the Congress the CP was joined by a few former Congress militants, but this did not transform it into a viable force.

The Second World War broke open the contradictions of Stalinism—the entry of the Soviet Union meant that the War had to be supported, which in turn meant that the CP had to promote Irish support for Britain in the War. This destroyed the CP in the Twenty-Six Counties, while the Six County section, The Communist Party of Northern Ireland, gave full support to Britain's war effort and to the existence of Northern Ireland. Later a CP, under the title Irish Workers League, re-emerged in the Twenty-Six Counties, so that there were two CPs in Ireland, conforming to the boundaries of partition. In 1970 they united to form the Communist Party of Ireland.

But the CPNI had two major assets. It was deeply embedded in the TUs in the North, and had won a small number of protestant workers. The residue of its gains during the war, when it was openly Unionist, meant that as the Republicans moved left the CP was able to have an influence quite out of proportion to its size; the Republicans anxious

to get rough to the protestant workers in the North, and pushed along by the internal propaganda of the Johnson wing, saw the CP as a possible channel to these workers. Experience has tended to reduce their illusions. The only other advantage which the CP has is a lively, and relatively large youth organisation—the Connolly Youth Movement, which tends to be more politically militant and flexible than its parent body. Not a very difficult achievement.

The CP has been by-passed. It was able to have an influence in the early stages of the Civil Rights movement, but its rigid opposition to anything other than the most limited campaign on 'democratic' rights, and its opposition to linking demands for jobs and homes to the civil rights demands, meant that it was soon tagging along far behind the political level of the mass of the CR activists. The future for Irish Marxism does not lie with this tiny conservative, ageing rump.

#### Irish Maoism

The Stalinist trend in Irish politics resulted in the tragedy of the CP; Maoism is its force. There are two main tendencies in Irish Maoism, one of which has gone over to a position of support for imperialism, the other has transcended sanity.

#### The Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist-Leninist)

The most typical maoist group was a student group formed in Trinity College, Dublin, originally called the Internationalists. This group was extremely idealist—its main emphasis was on the necessity to change oneself in order to be purged of all imperialist influences. It exhibited many of the characteristics of the various Maoist groups which sprung up in Western Europe in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet split and the Cultural Revolution. It was a hyperactive and fanatical sect which was completely unable to relate to political reality (for a whole period they declared that the main contradiction in Irish society was the cultural oppression which they alleged was experienced by the students). The organisation went from being the Internationalists in 1967 to the Irish Communist Movement (ML) in 1969, to the Irish Communist Party (ML) in 1970. Needless to say these changes did not correspond to any qualitative growth or significant working class implantation in the organisation. In the Six Counties, where the struggle against British imperialism was most intense and the radicalisation most widespread, they did not have any support. This did not prevent them proclaiming at their foundation conference in 1970 that they were leading the struggle against British imperialism! The tensions evoked in the organisation by politics of this type finally led to its disintegration in the winter of 1970-1 when one of its leading ideologues instructed the membership to go to the countryside to form peasant leagues to overthrow the Irish landlord class!!

#### The Irish Communist Organisation

The ICO is a much more serious tendency. It has, over the last two years, been forcing the pace in theoretical discussions within Irish

Marxism. The ICO started as a Mao-Stalinist group, rigidly applying the stages theory to Ireland. For the ICO it was simply a matter of completing the national/democratic revolution, and although the workers would take the leading role in this, the actual revolution would be simply about re-unification, and self-determination. What made the ICO more than an adjunct of the CP was its insistence on the need for THEORY; to the extent that it denounced any attempt by Marxists to get involved in struggle until they had built up an adequate theoretical analysis of Ireland. Before the foolishness of this position caught up with them they succeeded in producing a whole number of valuable pamphlets and studies, including illuminating factual material, and reprints of classic texts by Connolly and others. But inevitably their method—formal logic carried through to an extreme, which refrained from checking up analyses with empirical experience—began to lead them away, not only from Marxism, but from a basic class position.

It was specifically on the national issue that this situation developed. First they denounced the Civil Rights struggle, as being instituted by British imperialism, because of the aspirations of the British ruling class to reform the North. They discovered that the protestants in the North were a separate 'nationality', and should have the right to self-determination. They developed this, claiming that the main conflict within Ireland historically had been between catholic nationalism and the protestant nationality. This then developed to the accusation that this conflict represented the attempt of the catholic nationalists to coerce the protestants into a 32 county Republic against their will. The religious and communal divisions, the periodic rioting and pogroms in Northern Ireland are therefore seen as a reflection of this conflict. Communal tensions in Northern Irish industrial society first manifested themselves in the late 1820s. It would therefore be pretty hard for the catholic nation to have had coercive designs on the Protestant nation in the 1820s since according to the ICO, the 'Catholic Nation' came into being in the latter half of the 19th Century. The ICO's positions on the national issue have been supported by a very selective presentation of Irish history, which has simply ignored the difference between Republicanism, and the reactionary gomben trend in Irish nationalism represented by O'Connell, Griffith, Redmond, et al. They have ignored the forcible suppression of the real fighters for a 32 county Republic, by this same reactionary sector of the Irish nationalist bourgeoisie and the willingness of these reactionaries to compromise not only with British imperialism, but the Orange bourgeoisie of the North. The demagogic attempts of Fianna Fail to contain Republicanism, by spouting a Republican rhetoric, are presented as the cause of Republican sentiment within the Irish masses.

Having thus thoroughly confused the facts about history they then proceeded to declare that it was incumbent on all 'democrats' to recognise the legitimacy of the state of Northern Ireland. Thus has a Stalinist tendency moved from an erroneous position on how theory is developed, to support for a brutally reactionary state, founded by

threat of force, as a bridgehead against the Irish revolution, maintained by sectarian discrimination and police violence, and already nearly discarded by Imperialism, which maintains it only in order to prevent the whole Irish struggle from getting out of hand. It must be stressed that the ICO has not simply taken up a reactionary position on the question of partition, it has stated that the British troops in the North were there to carry out a progressive role (after July 1970) and has been moving to a position that imperialist capitalism is more progressive than national capitalism. How far the ICO will take their revisions of Marxism is not clear—sooner or later they will discover that their views were much more ably presented by Karl Kautsky, and will either recoil in horror, or finally shed their 'communist' skin.

The adoption, by the ICO, of the two nations theory and the conclusions which they drew from it, had the effect of completely altering their position on many political issues. Directly affected were their assessments of the national revolution and Republicanism. As late as March 1970 they wrote on Republicanism. ".....Though traditional Republicanism had become ineffective as an anti-imperialist force, it was its revolutionary history which attracted militant working class support. Its attraction for militant workers was a revolutionary attraction." (our emphasis) Now Republicanism is condemned as reactionary Catholic nationalism with which the catholic bourgeoisie delude the catholic working class. Perhaps the most dramatic revision of the ICO's previous political position was on the question of Maoism. In October 1969 a Chinese government paper, reporting on a gun battle between the British Army and an Orange mob, hailed the conflict as a mass struggle against British imperialism. The ICO at the time were engaged in portraying the struggle as essentially sectarian. The roots of such errors on behalf of the supposed leaders of the world anti-revisionist movement were tediously sought after. Slowly but surely the answer emerged. The Chinese were not Stalinist enough. Not only did they neglect to base their struggle against revisionist economics on that seminal (sic) work "Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR", but worse, they agreed with the Twentieth Party Conference criticisms of Stalin by Khrushchev. The fact that the Chinese Communist Party made the revolution against the wishes of Stalin is an uncomfortable fact that doesn't fit into the ICO's schema.

As we have stated, the ICO have succeeded up to now in forcing the pace of debate within Irish Marxism, and the way in which they have drawn out the logic of their position has brought up short a number of Irish marxists who were attracted to the 'two nations' theory but who opposed the ICO's stalinism. This is a dubious tribute in view of the fact that they are now withdrawing the bulk of their publications so that the 'Catholic nationalist' thread in them can be eliminated. By their own criteria, they have for a whole five year period been guilty of one of their own cardinal sins—sowing confusion in the Irish Working Class movement.

## 7. The Parties of the Bourgeoisie

---

For the British revolutionary left one of the blank spots in Irish politics is an understanding of the Free State bourgeois parties, and the Labour Parties North and South. The Unionist Party has been seen as the reactionary party of property that it is (with the exception that the significance of protestant working class support for it has not been fully realised); but for these other parties they have mechanically transferred British political relationships, and consequently have not understood their role. This has re-inforced the disinclination of the British left to understand Republicanism.

### Fianna Fail

The present 26 County ruling party Fianna Fail originated within the Republican forces which opposed the treaty. It was created and led by a demagogue, and bonapartist of considerable skill, Eamonn de Valera. It is fascinating to look back on the early days of Fianna Fail and see the terror they inspired in the breasts of the timid gentlemen of Cumann na nGaedheal; when Fianna Fail got a majority in 1932 there was serious speculation as to whether the police and army would allow them to take over. But de Valera's entry to the Dail in 1927 is symbolic. The Fianna Fail deputies had all appeared with revolvers in their pockets, in case they were forcibly refused entry, but when faced with the clerk of the Dail they tamely signed the oath, and walked into the chamber towards their destiny—soldiers with pockets weighed down by weapons they would never dare to use.

The secret of Fianna Fail has been its creation of a powerful political machine which has used the Republican sentiment amongst the petit-bourgeoisie, the workers and small farmers to gain an electoral base. The party itself is run by completely bourgeois interests and has always used radical and Republican rhetoric in a completely

cynical way. During those early years de Valera used the most complex arguments to justify his party's participation, without accepting the Treaty settlement. In February 1929 he described the Cumann na nGaedheal government as having a 'de facto' position achieved, not legitimately, but by a 'coup d'etat in the summer of 1922'. Having failed to establish a legitimate government he had chosen to accept the de facto position and work within it but "Those who continue on in organisation which we have left can claim exactly the same continuity that we claimed up to 1925". In other words, the leader of a future government party was declaring that the assembly through which his party would exercise government was not the legitimate expression of the will of the Irish people, and that this legitimacy lay just as much with the Republicans outside the Dail, whom he would later try to crush. It is by such intricate sidestepping, such flexible manoeuvring, that Fianna Fail has advanced the interests of the 26 County capitalist class.

#### Political Credit

There can be no doubt that Fianna Fail's success in prosecuting the Economic War, and creating the base for contemporary Irish industry has left it with considerable political credit. The ending of the 'Treaty Ports' agreement, whereby Britain had use of certain Irish ports for military purposes, and the Free State's neutrality during the Second World War were also substantial coups, directly attributable to de Valera's political skill. But the price paid for such concessions was considerable. It meant that Fianna Fail had to demonstratively prevent the Republicans from upsetting the delicate balance of forces. In other words they had to take action against the IRA when it attacked British imperialism. The severity with which Fianna Fail pursued this course reflected the fact that it was based on a stronger and more ruthless section of the bourgeoisie than Cumann na nGaedheal. In fact the casualties imposed on the Republican forces by Fianna Fail probably exceed those suffered during the civil war.

But today Fianna Fail's room for such manoeuvring has diminished. Having created a dramatic expansion of Irish industry through Sean Lemass's 'economic miracle', and having reached the limits of that expansion, it now has to turn seriously to the problem of how to cement the position of the Irish capitalist class. This means a new deal with British imperialism. As we have seen the deal was to be established through reform in the North, leading to a closer integration of the economies of the two Irish states and Britain, within the EEC, the plans for this were upset when the Unionist Party began to fragment under the pressures of the Civil Rights struggle and the protestant ultras. For the 26 County ruling class this meant a postponement of the deal, and in turn this meant a division within that class over how to react to the crisis in the North.

#### The 'Arms Conspiracy'

It was this which caused the great arms smuggling scandal. We do not intend to examine the details of the events here, but the very fact

that ministers of the ruling party should be put on trial for smuggling guns to the North gives a sufficiently clear idea of the crisis within Fianna Fail and the Irish capitalist class. Behind the headlines and the courtroom drama was the conflict between the Lynch wing of Fianna Fail which wanted to make things as easy as possible for the British government, in the hope of rich rewards when the crisis in the North was settled, and his rivals who wanted to use the crisis to strengthen the position of the Free State capitalist class, by making things more difficult for British imperialism, in the hope of being able to exert pressure for greater concessions. The arms, and the large sums of money which were offered to the IRA were an attempt to buy a section of the movement in the North for use as a bargaining counter.

What has been significant about the dissident wing of Fianna Fail has not been its 'militancy' but its tremendous weakness and indecision. There is little doubt that had the dismissed cabinet ministers tried to launch a rival to Fianna Fail they would have succeeded with ease; the fact that Lynch could not get a jury to convict them is an indication of this. Bold decisive action would have split Fianna Fail, pulled over other political forces, and most important taken away a large part of Fianna Fail's traditional 'Republican' base of support. Instead the possibility of a new 'Republican' party was used as a long-drawn out threat to Lynch, giving him plenty of time to recover from the blow of Blaney, Haughey and Boland's aquittal, and re-organise his support within the party. When Boland launched the new party, Aontacht Eireann (Irish Unity) Blaney and Haughey remained in Fianna Fail, and Aontacht Eireann gives every evidence of being merely a device for pressurising Fianna Fail.

This underlines the basic fact about politics in the Free State; all of the slack within the Treaty settlement has been taken up by de Valera, and Fianna Fail can only advance the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie by a new settlement which will stabilise a neo-colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland. Not only can the Irish bourgeoisie not advance the national revolution a single step, but it now has to retreat and give up gains won in the past. It also shows that Fianna Fail remains the chief instrument through which such a new deal can be worked out. It is Fianna Fail, and particularly the Lynch wing, which is British Imperialism's chief agency in the 26 counties.

#### Fine Gael

Fine Gael today is much what Cumann na nGaedhead was fifty years ago—a staid conservative party happy to live on the crumbs from British Imperialism's table, only asking that they be blessed first by the Vatican. Like Cumann na nGaedheal it draws support from the older sections of the Irish capitalist class, and the land-owning bourgeoisie. However, looking at its history, it is evident that it is a party which would never gain office resting on its own political equilibrium, so that it has from time to time made opportunist political initiatives for the purpose of getting into power.

### The Blueshirts

Cumann na nGaedheal was considerably upset by the rise of Fianna Fail: from the treaty onwards it had dominated a Dail which was so fragmented that there was not even a viable opposition. Cumann na nGaedheal had come to believe in its own divine right to govern. The rise of Fianna Fail was part of, and contributed to, considerable social unrest within the 26 Counties. After Fianna Fail gained a majority in 1932, the future for Cumann na nGaedheal looked bleak. The uncertainty came not simply from the threat of Fianna Fail's wide base of support, but from the way in which politics were being conducted at that time; we have already mentioned the support which the IRA gave to de Valera's early campaigns. This was not simply a matter of canvassing and propaganda work, it involved breaking up Cumann na nGaedheal meetings in a quite violent manner. In reply Cumann na nGaedheal linked itself with an independent organisation, the National Guard, and became a party with all the outward trappings of Fascism.

In 1931 the Army Comrades Association had been formed as an organisation for ex-members of the Free State Army; in 1933 it became the National Guard, with General Eoin O'Duffy, a former Police Commissioner, dismissed by Fianna Fail, as leader, and a blue shirt as its uniform. Although at first the Blueshirts did not have a formal link with Cumann na nGaedheal, their first major initiative was a demonstration to the graves of Michael Collins, one of the signatories of the Treaty, and Kevin O'Higgins, a Cumann na nGaedheal minister, whose assassination in 1927 had been used by Cumann na nGaedheal as an excuse for draconian legislation designed to hit at the Republicans, and block the advance of Fianna Fail. This shows their links with that sector of Irish bourgeois politics which defended the Treaty. In September 1933, Cumann na nGaedheal united with the Blueshirts and the National Centre Party to form a new party Fine Gael, (literally 'Tribe of Gaels', but interpreted as 'United Ireland') with O'Duffy as President. For an exotic year Fine Gael, and the Blueshirts (who were now its youth movement 'The League of Youth') played at being fascists, lacing their politics with corporatist ideas, and holding up Mussolini's Italy as a model. But the social unrest and political violence dwindled as Fianna Fail gripped the reigns of power more surely, and the atmosphere favouring fascist rhetoric declined. O'Duffy and the Blueshirts became more and more embarrassing, and in September 1934 O'Duffy was forced to resign, The League of Youth was de-militarised, and the next September a new constitution was adopted which eliminated the last of the corporatist policies. In politics and composition Fine Gael was now almost indistinguishable from Cumann na nGaedheal of 1932.

### Coalition Mark I

The next time Fine Gael kicked over the traces was in 1948 when it participated in a coalition with Clann na Talmhan (a rural party), the Irish Labour Party, the National Labour Party, and Clann na Poblachta

a new 'participationist' break from the Republicans). It was this government which in 1949 declared a 26 County 'Republic', stealing Fianna Fail's thunder. But despite the impetus of the imaginative Clann na Poblachta, there was little scope for radical change within the 26 Counties, and in 1951 Fianna Fail was returned to power.

### Coalition Mark II

The Arms Conspiracy scandal has weakened Fianna Fail, and for a time it looked as though it would fall. This prompted Fine Gael to make a new turn. They concluded an agreement with the Labour Party in the hope of being able to form a coalition government. The only basis for such a coalition would be an even greater readiness than Lynch to become subservient to British imperialism, and this very openness about its objectives could marginally strengthen Fine Gael amongst those sectors of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie who want such an agreement. A future Fine Gael government, or coalition would emphasise that the only road for Irish capitalism is one of closer integration with British and European capitalism.

### The New Ulster Movement and the Alliance Party

The narrow base for the kind of Unionist reformism which Captain O'Neil tried to create is illustrated by the New Ulster Movement, and its political expression the Alliance Party. These groups consist of a small section of the protestant and catholic middle class, who would like to see a non-sectarian state, in which they could live undisturbed. This is a dream because, 1) they are part of a social layer which is too small, and which has such slender historic roots, that it can not balance between the major forces in Six County society, and 2) it wants to create this paradise within the boundaries of Northern Ireland. If the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, backed by all the power of British Imperialism could not do it, there is little chance of the middle class doing it.

### Irish Social Democracy

Despite the fact that the Irish Labour Party traces its descent from James Connolly, it must be made clear that Social Democracy in Ireland has always been a reactionary force imported through the Imperialist relationship. The early Irish branches of the Social Democratic Federation, and the Independent Labour Party were part of their British parent bodies, who accepted the Union of Ireland and Britain without question, seeking only to ameliorate the conditions of the workers within the Union. Connolly fought these tendencies bitterly, and his Irish Socialist Republican Party was organised explicitly to combat their pro-imperialist policies. During Connolly's second period in Ireland he did take the initiative in founding the Labour Party as the political wing of the new Trade Union movement, which he had helped to build, but this was during the period when all of Ireland expected the Third Home Rule Bill to be enacted, and was settling down to prepare for the conflict between Irish Capital and

Irish Labour which would become dominant after the settling of many of Ireland's national problems.

#### The Irish Labour Party

The roots of the Irish Labour Party must be sought in the new Trade Union movement which sprang up in Ireland in the early part of the century. James Larkin's Irish Transport and General Workers Union was modelled on the American syndicalist movement, and the syndicalist tradition has been very strong in Ireland. While this created a powerful TU movement it meant that its political ideology was weak, and while both Connolly and Larkin understood the need for the workers to fight for national demands, this view was not shared by most of the other leaders. When Connolly helped to found the Labour Party he united the syndicalist leaders with the small Irish Social Democracy, and his own scattered personal supporters. This meant that when the Home Rule Bill was challenged by Carson, support within the Labour Movement for Connolly's stand was small. With Connolly's death Social Democracy inherited the Irish Labour Party.

#### Labour Waits

From 1918 onwards the Labour Party stood aside from the national struggle, refusing to give a lead to the Irish workers. During the Black and Tan wars it accepted de Valera's dictum 'Labour must wait', and did not seek to use the power of the workers either to assist in the struggle against British Imperialism, or to exert pressure to get a bigger political stake for the workers in an independent Ireland. In the Free State Dail the Labour Party at first benefited from the abstention of the Republicans; as the only effective opposition party it won votes which would have gone to a participationist Sinn Fein, but with the rise of Fianna Fail many of its votes were siphoned off and it declined as an electoral force.

It was weakened further by the schismatic nature of the Irish Trade Union movement, and the struggle between sectional interests within it, for a time a split, the National Labour Party operated as a result of this. Its participation in the 1948 coalition emphasised that it had no basic differences with the other Treatyite parties, and indeed at times Fianna Fail seemed more radical. This despite a constant shuffling back and forward on whether it was a socialist party, depending on the amount of pressure from the Catholic Hierarchy.

#### The New Deal

The 'Economic Miracle' of the early sixties increased the size of the Irish working class, and strengthened the Trade Unions and the Labour Party. The TU movement became more united and the Labour Party grew in size and electoral support. A left-wing developed, which proved a fruitful field of work for the Marxists in the Irish Workers Group, and the Party itself took a left stance, becoming the most radical Social Democratic party in Europe. But the laws of history are inexorable; still the Labour Party stood aside from the national struggle, and when

the economic changes which had created its new growth and influence brought the national question back to the centre of the political stage the Labour Party moved over to a position of support for a deal which would link Ireland with British imperialism.

The key figure in this new departure has been Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, of United Nations and Congo fame. O'Brien's adoption of the Labour Party gave him a powerful sounding board from which to propound his own views on the Irish situation; devoid of any better ideas the Labour Party has followed him, and as a result is no longer neutral on the national question, it is in fact four-square behind the plans of British imperialism, and the more clear-sighted section of the Irish bourgeoisie.

O'Brien has taken the 'two nations' theory, and has used it as a convenient basis for acceptance of the partition of Ireland. He has denounced those who are fighting British imperialism in the North, and has labelled Republicanism as 'Fascism'. Since he is a very clever, and learned gentleman he can put up a good case; however, like the ICO, this is based on a rigid formal logic, which chooses those aspects of Fascism which can be matched with aspects of Republicanism, which denounced the 'brutality' of the IRA, but which avoids any reference to the role of British imperialism in creating the conditions in which an armed movement, and violent methods became an integral part of the national struggle. With O'Brien the LP has become the most coherent voice of those in the bourgeoisie and middle class who want to liquidate the national struggle through a federal solution. The LP has thus deserted its former radical stance, and has, in adopting a policy of working towards a coalition with Fine Gael, forced out the best of the left-wingers, while expelling any who remained. As if to symbolise its new role, and to mock its own accusation of fascism against the Republicans it has refused to expel Stevie Coughlan, a Deputy who has become notorious for his unabashed anti-semitism.

#### The Northern Irish Labour Party

Just as Social Democracy in the 26 Counties accepted the status quo of the Irish Free State, Social Democracy in the North accepted the limitations of Northern Ireland. As with the South, the Trade Unions had a great deal to do with this; and the Northern Trade Unions had some important features which determined the direction which the NILP was to follow.

The development of heavy industry in the North East brought with it the development of an aristocracy of labour which constituted the earliest organised layer of the Irish working class. As in Britain, this layer was the chief conservatising force within the Labour movement, but unlike Britain it had been created in a sectarian context in which job privilege was given to protestants. This led to 'Walkerism', an ideology propounded by William Walker, a trade union leader in the North around the turn of the century. Walker supported the British connection, and opposed Home Rule; he reflected a layer of workers whose privileged position depended on that connection. While Walkerism

was never officially embraced by the LP, the very pressure of the Unionists meant that it was always implicit. This was particularly necessary when two other factors are taken into account; the occasional forays into 'Labourism' by Unionist opportunists, or working class Orange demagogues, and the deliberate smashing of the Catholic working class including the use of pogroms and terror to render it politically impotent. This meant that Labour had to seek a niche amongst those workers who, while accepting the Union, and later partition, saw the need for a political expression outside the Unionist Party.

Thus despite the strong TU movement in the North the LP could not challenge the sectarianism amongst the best organised workers, and had to become a minor Unionist Party. It is true that a small layer of left-wing protestant workers has developed within the party, and in Derry the influence of Eamonn McCann created a strong Labour Party and Young Socialists, which played an important part in the early Civil Rights struggles, but this has not confirmed hopes that the NILP would serve to unite protestant and catholic workers on a militant socialist programme; the new militancy of the catholic workers has flown through other channels, and the polarisation against reform amongst protestant workers has narrowed the NILP's niche. It will not play a role in solving the Irish question.

#### The Social Democratic and Labour Party

The first act of the new-born Six County state was to launch a series of vicious pogroms against its one-third catholic minority. As each generation of that minority grew up the state made quite sure that it knew what the score was, by giving it a taste of the old medicine. This led to deep demoralisation within the minority. What militant feelings there were supported Sinn Fein, which did not participate in Stormont. For these reasons they never threw up a solid organised political expression. An additional factor was the patronage system in Northern Irish politics particularly at local level—an MP or Councillor had much more leeway to distribute perquisites, and get grievances re-dressed than his counterpart in Britain; this had led to a political system axed around individual political figures, and has meant, for the Catholics especially, the dominance of individuals, maintaining their position through the patronage they can distribute.

The Social Democratic and Labour Party is such in name only. It does not comply with the Marxist definition of Social Democracy. It has united political figures who rose through their role in the Civil Rights movement, like John Hume with traditional catholic ghetto politicians like Gerry Fitt. They do not represent any section of the working class. If they reflect any social milieu at all it is a very small section of the catholic middle class which has tried to take over the leadership of the catholic workers. The force which brought the SDLP together was the upsurge of Republicanism amongst the catholic workers, which made a more coherent political alternative necessary.

Basing themselves on the ghettos they had no choice but to withdraw from Stormont when the British government refused an investigation into the killing of two catholics, by the British Army in Derry, having undertaken this political demonstration they were then forced to stay out by the introduction of internment, and were forced also to refuse the terms offered to them for discussions towards settling the problem. It was then necessary, in order to try and get the political initiative, to announce their 'Assembly of the Northern Irish People'. Whatever their rhetoric they are available for talks should it become politically possible for them. They are a very dangerous block on the road to the Irish revolution, the full nature of whose role is yet to be seen.



# 8. The Coming Irish Revolution

The struggles in Ireland over the last three years have a historic significance. That they should follow hard on the heels of the May-June 1968 events in France is fitting; it was the French bourgeois revolution which inspired the first great Irish revolutionary movement, the United Irishmen, and it was France which was to give them military assistance. It is Ireland which follows France as the European nation which has developed the most mature revolutionary situation. But, unlike France, the events in Ireland have not held the attention of the world, Ireland is not at the centre of Europe, and Ireland's political problems are not 'European', in the sense that they share few of the main features of the European industrial nations. Ireland has struggled alone, and in the shadow of Britain, for so long that revolutionaries in Europe have scarcely noticed, their eyes are turned to Latin America, to South East Asia, to the Middle East. But Ireland could shake the foundations of capitalism in Europe. A Cuba off the coast of Europe would have more profound implications than Cuba has had for Latin America. The inertia which the response of European revolutionaries towards the Irish struggle has revealed is a key weakness which must be overcome. The Irish struggle needs European solidarity, not only for material aid, but to integrate the Irish vanguard into the political experience and the advances in Marxist theory of the European revolutionary movement.

To render this solidarity it is necessary that the Irish revolution is understood, so this chapter will attempt to draw out its key factors discussing also some of the important ideas about this revolution which are being contested amongst Irish revolutionaries.

## The Permanent Revolution in Ireland

The Irish national/democratic revolution of 1916-22 failed, or rather it was aborted. The preceding chapters have tried to show how this

led directly to the struggles of the last three years. If we have proved our case then we can draw out the main law determining the course of the revolution—Permanent Revolution. The theory of Permanent Revolution developed by Trotsky showed that in the era of imperialism the tasks of the Bourgeois revolution could only be accomplished through the triumph of a revolution which put the working class in power. Trotsky put forward this theory after analysing the Russian revolution of 1905. It was proved correct by the revolution of 1917.

It has been objected that the theory of Permanent Revolution does not apply to Ireland, because the land question in Ireland has been solved. This is a serious point, the main Bourgeois/democratic task which Trotsky saw the Russian revolution accomplishing was land distribution, and the main social force which would support the working class, apart from the working class itself, was the peasantry. But to apply Permanent Revolution in this mechanical way, is a grave error. The application of the theory of Permanent Revolution should be understood as defining those revolutions which must take upon themselves task which properly belong to the bourgeois revolution, and the particular tasks which must be tackled can only be specified through an examination of the situation within the given nation.

## Tariffs and Partition

When we look at Ireland we can see that despite the land question, being ameliorated before the turn of the century the national struggle, far from declining, flared up more fiercely; so that Ireland's national demands were not conditional on the existence of the land question. In fact the main demand of Sinn Fein was the right to erect tariff barriers, and the opposition of the Northern Bourgeoisie to tariff barriers was the main reason for the resistance of the protestant population of the North East to Home Rule. The success of the Orange ruling class, and British Imperialism held back the imposition of tariff barriers for more than ten years after the gaining of 'independence' by the 26 Counties. When those tariff barriers were imposed they lasted only briefly, and their main achievement was to give the 26 County bourgeoisie more leverage for better terms of trade between itself and Britain, it did not create an independent economy, and it did not create the basis for a strong Irish industry, only a relatively stronger one. This failure was to have profound implications for the Irish working class and small farmers, it kept the former a minority of the population until recently, and swept drove after drove of the latter off the land, not into Irish industry, but into emigration.

Had the Irish bourgeoisie succeeded in erecting tariff barriers, it would have laid the basis for a strong Irish working class, organised in large scale industries, and therefore ready to struggle for a socialist revolution, untruncated by any national demands. As it is the Irish working class must, to create a socialist Ireland, first create an independent unified Irish economy, and break the stranglehold of imperialism, which distorts the whole economic development of

Ireland. Only through this can it achieve the requisite social weight to enable it to re-shape Ireland along socialist lines.

It must be re-emphasised, neither the Irish bourgeoisie, or any section of it can move any further along this road than de Valera took Ireland in the '30s. In recent years Irish capitalism has been moving towards EEC entry, this is of course determined by the need to keep the British market, but Irish bourgeois ideologues have argued that by entering the Market Ireland will be able to wean herself away from reliance on Britain, and widen her economic relations with European capitalism. In theory this might seem plausible, although it avoids the problem of Ireland's disadvantage as a primary producer; but in political terms it is nonsense. Britain's application for EEC membership was refused in the past decade for political reasons, and now she is to be admitted for political reasons, as a counterweight to the strength of France and/or Germany. Far from European capital competing to widen Ireland's trade, the competition will be for the best possible relations with Britain. It is more likely that Ireland will be more subordinate to Britain within the EEC.

#### The Comparison of Russia

If the working class revolution in Ireland must break the strait-jacket of the 1922 settlement, and national independence and re-unification are pre-requisites for a socialist Ireland, this in turn has tremendous implications for the strategy of the Irish revolution. The issues over which that revolution will be fought are not necessarily primarily working class ones, they will in all probability be primarily national democratic. This conclusion will doubtless be resisted by some Marxists, whose interpretation of Permanent Revolution lets them see only the working class tasks of the revolution, and who therefore spurn demands or struggles which have a national and/or democratic content.

A glance at the Russian revolution will show us that this interpretation does not measure up to the experience of history. Had the Russian Revolution been solely about the working class gaining power, and taking control of industry it would have failed. The workers were a minority of the population and they could never have taken or held power on their own. The revolution succeeded because it combined the struggle of the workers, with the struggle of the peasants on the land, with the struggle of the soldiers against the war, with the struggle of the oppressed nationalities within Russia, with the struggle of the oppressed nations within the Czarist empire, with the struggle of the intelligentsia for cultural freedom, etc. etc. All of these sectors of struggle were united, under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, around the demand for 'All Power to the Soviets'.

But it was not simply a matter of these sectors of struggle being united, they were focussed around a political strategy which was based on the contradictions of Russian capitalism, and the political crisis of the Provisional Government. It was the War, and the failure of the Provisional Government to end it, which provided the key struggle which raised the issue of Soviet Power. NOT nationalisation of industry,

NOT workers control of production, NOT the main demands of the workers at all. The War for a short, but crucial period was the sharpest political contradiction for the capitalist class, and could unite the wide section of the Russian population. The solution to the problem of the War could only have been found, at that time, by a government of Soviets, this government in ending the War consolidated its power through the nationalisation of industry, the institution of workers control the distribution of land to the peasants, the liberation of the oppressed nations and nationalities, and the encouragement of cultural freedom. It was this combination of bourgeois/national/democratic demands centralised by the struggle to end the war, and achieved by the establishment of working class political power, which constituted the permanence of the Russian Revolution.

If we apply these lessons to Ireland we can see not only the need to combine national and working class demands, but that the strategy of the revolution must take up the sharpest political contradictions within Ireland, irrespective of their class nature, while orienting the struggles around these contradictions towards working class political power. Quite obviously the sharpest political contradiction is partition, and the oppression of the minority in the North. It is this which must become the central issue for Irish revolutionaries.

#### Smash Stormont

The strategy of the Irish revolution must therefore focus on sharpening the struggle in the North, to create the greatest possible crisis for British Imperialism, and the Irish bourgeoisie North and South. The main single factor which would attain this would be the smashing of Stormont and the complete disruption of the State, which would also involve the destruction of the Unionist Party as an instrument of British domination in Ireland. The unfolding events of the last three years have revealed that British Imperialism is willing to take any steps possible to preserve these two institutions, and that they are desperately afraid of the impetus which their eradication would give to the minority, and indeed to the whole Irish people. It is true that a small section of the British ruling class has been pressing for direct rule, but despite its ability to speak through the pages of the 'Sunday Times' it is still a minority, even the Labour Party leaders are united with the Tories in trying to preserve Stormont and the Unionists. They would like to use the Unionist Party, as the only viable bourgeois political formation in the North, to give reforms to the minority, they are quite unwilling that the minority should take them. They hope also in a new deal with Irish capitalism, to use the Unionist Party as a lever against Fianna Fail, whose Bonapartist nature, and whose loose grip on the reins of power makes it a not completely reliable instrument.

If Stormont were made unviable, and was swept out of the way, it would cause tremendous problems for British imperialism, it would give new confidence to the minority, and would stimulate the 26 County workers and small farmers, while also causing difficulties for

Fianna Fail. We must be clear that these difficulties would not constitute an insuperable crisis for the British and Irish Bourgeoisies, but they would open up new opportunities for advancing the revolution. Even if direct rule were imposed this could give imperialism at the most a temporary respite, like that achieved by the Labour Government between August 1969 and July 1970. They could not fulfil the expectations of the minority, since they could not overcome the resistance to reform by the protestant ultras, this would create the basis for a new and more effective struggle.

#### The Alternative to Stormont

It is even more important to smash Stormont now that the basis for an alternative state structure exists—the civil resistance movement. At present it is weak, and very limited in its functions, and local committees are not sufficiently linked together. But it does form the instrument through which the minority is undermining the Stormont administration, and extending their refusal to pay rent and rates, through non-co-operation with the state, to direct action to disrupt it. United with effective military action it could grind the operations of the state to a halt, and make its continued existence unviable. The people of the ghettos have before them the example of Bogside and Falls in August '69, they know that they can control their own areas, and unite their community in resistance to the state. It is by assisting the people to understand the lessons of this experience, and leading them in attempts to solidify and extend the structure of their resistance organisations that revolutionaries will fulfil their responsibilities.

But although the building of resistance from street to street, and from town to town is important, it is not enough, it must pose a challenge not only to Stormont but to The Free State Dail, and to British imperialism. Here the proposals of the Provisional Republicans could be valuable. The Provisionals propose to set up a democratic assembly for the people of Ulster (that is the nine counties of the historic province of Ulster). This assembly 'Dail Uladh' (Ulster Parliament) would seek the allegiance of the population in the nine counties, and would take over the functions of a state within the area of both Stormont and the Free State Dail. This would be linked to the setting up of similar assemblies for the other three provinces of Ireland. Already they have set up Comhairle Uladh (Ulster Council) and Comhairle Chonnachta (Connaught Council) to prepare the way for Dail Uladh and Dail Chonnachta. They claim to have plans for similar initiatives in Munster and Leinster. The weakness of the plans is that they attempt to create these institutions from above, and are not motivated by a clear understanding of the need for working class political power and the socialist road for the Irish people. Nevertheless, despite the inadequate form which these proposals take, there is every possibility that they could be given quite a different content by the actions of the Irish workers. If they became a viable expression of any section of the workers, revolutionaries would have to fight within them to advance a socialist programme, and turn them into Irish Soviets, based firmly on, and elected from the civil resistance committees.

In other words, although the instrument by which the Irish people can take over the ownership of Ireland does not yet exist, within the civil resistance, in an embryonic way, dual power is developing. It is by strengthening that dual power and seeking the ways in which it can gain the allegiance of ever wider sections of the Irish people that the revolution will be brought closer. Irish revolutionaries have an advantage in that they can appeal to the vivid experience of Dail Eireann between 1918-21.

#### Military Problems

There can be no question of a successful political challenge by the oppressed minority, without an adequate military capacity. It is the armed struggle which has created the situation in which imperialism has been unable to impose a solution, and which has underpinned the self-confidence of the minority. The existence of the IRA as a genuine people's militia has been of unparalleled importance. But Republicans should ask themselves whether their genuine political disagreements mean that they must automatically be divided in military action. There are of course important differences in the proclaimed military objectives of the Officials and the Provisionals; the Provisionals have openly taken the offensive against the British Army, and have pursued a policy of sabotage which is aimed at making the Six County state unworkable. The Officials say that they will take military action on a defensive basis, and in retaliation for acts of brutality by the British Army.

It does not take expert military knowledge to know that the line between offensive and defensive action is not very well defined. In fact since the Provisionals withdrew from the more foolish aspects of their bombing campaign, following the negative reactions to the Mountainview Tavern, and Electricity Board bombings, the actual form of military activities by the two IRA's has become more similar. This applies even more to local initiatives, which do not always reflect the pre-occupations of those who issue Irish Republican Publicity Bureau statements. At the beginning of 1971 there were a spate of incidents in which Provisionals and Officials turned their guns against each other. Fortunately they have succeeded in eliminating such incidents, but the Irish people cannot afford such divisions between Republican soldiers, and the leaderships of both Republican Armies have the responsibility to ensure that their military efforts are channelled against the oppressors in the most effective way possible. This means that they must consider joint military activity, and joint commands. The suspicions and hostility between both sections are deep, but not as important as the defence of the people of the North. The creation of means by which the civil resistance movement developed organs to co-ordinate all military activity would be a step forward for the entire Irish people, and the Republicans ought to strive towards that objective.

#### Objections

We have outlined the content of the Irish revolution, and the means

by which it can be advanced. It is necessary now to discuss arguments which Irish revolutionaries would put against some of these ideas. These objections are serious and indicate deep problems which the Irish workers are going to face; in discussing them we are not trying to give the final answer, but to deepen the discussion, as a contribution towards solving these problems.

#### Stages

The Official Republicans propose a strategy along the following lines:

"Between the present state of affairs.....and the establishment of the socialist republic there are many stages."....."We are not at a stage where we are strong enough to make and achieve the demand for socialism."....."there are two main obstacles....." "Firstly, the political development in the 26 Counties has not been sufficient: mass agitation has not regained the level it had before the summer of 1969; and secondly the overwhelming mass of Protestant workers are under Fascistic Paisleyite influence."....."The immediate issue facing the Republican and democratic forces is to smash internment, securing the release of the jailed men, and to thwart the plans of Heath, Lynch, Faulkner and co. to drag Ireland into the Common Market against the will of the mass of the people."....."In the North the mass pressure of the civil rights movement has already placed in jeopardy the chances of the Orange Unionist regime surviving. This pressure must be kept up until Stormont is replaced by a properly democratic autonomous administration with the express power to decide for itself about the EEC."....."The system of repression and sectarian discrimination must be brought to an end; and the democratic forces are strong enough to win this demand."....."The way forward is to achieve the broadest unity of anti-Unionist and anti-Imperialist forces. By this means it will be possible to ensure genuine democratic reform in the North, and....weaken the grip of imperialism by exposing its hiring collaborators"....."By struggling for basic rights.....we can build a viable and credible alternative to the present imperialist system. We can then build our socialist republic."<sup>1</sup>

As we have pointed out, the key weakness in Republican ideology is the question of the state, this is why they find it possible to pose an abstraction like a "properly democratic autonomous administration", and consign to the vil resistance movement the role of 'pressure'. This formulation is a step forward. Right up until the imposition of internment, they had been in favour of the retention of Stormont, in a democratised form. The immediate and total rejection of not only Stormont but the NI state by the minority made a change in position necessary, but it also showed that they had been behind the mass of the catholics. Unless they now define the structures through which the minority is to exercise mass democracy they will still find themselves behind them. The very fact that events occurred in this way shows the weakness of the 'stages' theory, the minority

<sup>1</sup> "United Irishman", October 1971.

did not go through a stage of wanting a 'democratic' Stormont, they moved directly from unwilling acceptance to outright rejection. Unless the civil resistance can provide a developing perspective, which can guarantee or give a reasonable hope, of a permanent answer to their oppression they will section by section opt back into the system, until almost overnight the civil resistance will melt. The minority cannot be turned on and off like a tap, and they can not be used simply as a form of pressure. That is why the bridge between the present situation and a socialist republic is not pressure for a reformed Six County state, but the development of the organisations of the minority so that they can feel their own power, and understand the scale of the tasks to which they are called by history. In that way too they can begin to show the way to the 26 County workers.

We must be clear that there is no guarantee that such a strategy, inadequately worked out as it is, would either gain a victory or prevent a defeat, but it is at least as likely to succeed as a demand for a 'properly democratic autonomous administration'. What is certain is that the Irish working class will learn more about its own capabilities in one month of fighting for such a perspective, than in a year of fighting for a re-amped Stormont.

#### The Protestant Workers

Underpinning most 'stages' theory is the terrible problem of the protestant workers. Few national liberation struggles have faced a challenge of one million, overwhelmingly working class people, who are passionately, violently, opposed to the national struggle, and who see their interests in maintaining the imperialist connection.

At the start of the Civil Rights struggle there were great hopes that the protestants could be won over by a non-sectarian struggle. This failed. No matter how much Civil Rights spokesmen stressed that their demands were for the benefit of everyone in the Six Counties, the protestant workers became more and more convinced that their aims were to make them submit to the church of Rome and the gombeen 26 County 'Republic'. As the struggle has developed they have become even more convinced of this. The Irish vanguard has been forced to abandon its simplistic formulations, and seek other answers.

#### Self Determination?

The ICO's theory that the protestants are a nationality, has had some influence in fostering the idea that the protestants should have some form of self-determination. The problem is that the meaning of this self-determination has not been defined. The taking of such a position led the ICO to distort Irish history, since the only kind of protestant self-determination which has any meaning is a pro-imperialist determination. The ICO, to avoid this conclusion, created the legend that the real problem was the attempt of the catholic nation to coerce the protestant nation into a 32 County Republic. Having said A, they

proceeded to say B, and took up a pro-imperialist standpoint themselves.

In fact the protestants long ago ceased to have any of the material aspects of a separate nationality. All that separates them from the rest of the population of Ireland today is 1) their relative privileges, 2) the Orange ideology. Could a free Ireland allow them the right to maintain these? Only if it was quite certain that they were in no position to attack it. Self-determination can not be granted if it means the maintenance of these two positions. But if they are eliminated, or voluntarily given up then the main factors separating the protestants from the rest of the Irish population will have disappeared. It might be objected that they have no desire to speak Irish, or involve themselves in Gaelic culture; if that is the case the rest of the Irish nation ought to give them that freedom, but they do not need self-determination for such slight reasons. In any case, is it reasonable to believe that the protestants are willing to fight to the death against the terror of the Gaelic language, and the horror of Hurling? The protestants should be guaranteed the right to religious and cultural freedom in an Irish Workers Republic, but they should not be given the right to maintain their privileges, and reactionary ideology at the expense of the rest of the Irish people, and as a bridgehead against the Irish revolution.

#### A "Normal" Six Counties?

But even amongst those who accept that the aim is to win the protestants into the Irish nation, there is the conception that, possibly, a transition phase of a drastically changed Six County state, could eliminate a great deal of sectarianism, and win protestant workers over to the right side of the barricades. One of the leaders of the Officials in the North, Malachy McCurran put it this way, "I believe that if you destroy the barriers, or force the establishment to remove the legislation.....which helps maintain the sectarian barriers in the minds of people.....then you have a greater opportunity of creating from within them support for revolutionary objectives, and a revolutionary movement." ".....if it (the Civil Rights programme) succeeded in creating some kind of basic normal society, in which we could get our message across to a larger section of the people, whether they are catholic or protestant, we could create in their minds the idea that there is an alternative to the kind of structures they have been supporting....."<sup>1</sup>

This viewpoint would be viable if the core of the protestant demands was for the preservation of a Six County state; but it is not the case, they want the maintenance of a sectarian state in which not only would their privileges be guaranteed, but there would also be oppression of the catholics. Far from a reformed Six County state giving a period of respite, in which they could be induced to change their minds, they would fight as bitterly against it as they would against a 32 County Workers Republic. There is however a certain truth in Malachy's arguments about the des-

truction of the sectarian institutions destroying sectarianism; it has been the existence of partition and the deliberate policies of the British and Six County ruling classes which have maintained it. Once these institutions are destroyed Orangeism will wither on the stem. But first they have to be destroyed, and the only way in which this can be done is through a struggle for power, in which it is necessary to involve the largest possible forces. This means a struggle for a united Ireland, mobilising the mass of the Irish people. If this did get underway, and it was clear that it would win, the 'Orange backlash' would be considerably reduced, simply because it would have little chance of success.

#### The Trade Unions

Another school of thought emphasises the possibility of non-sectarian institutions gradually changing the climate of opinion amongst the working class; the central role in this would be played by the TU movement. This is a persistent myth, particularly amongst British leftists. We have already shown how the earliest organised sections of the working class were in fact the Northern protestants, and that they constituted an aristocracy of labour which supported the Union within the Labour movement. If the Northern TU's pass pious resolutions about the terrible consequences of sectarianism well and good; but before we take them seriously we must see them gaining equal opportunities within industry for catholics, fighting to eradicate the division between skilled craft jobs for protestants, and labouring jobs for catholics, and taking action to enforce employment of catholics in the shippards in proportion to their numbers in the population. If the TU's start to do these things they might contribute, but until then we must remain sceptical.

#### A Revolution Against Workers?

It will also be argued that it is unthinkable to carry out a revolution against a large section of the working class. As with an earlier argument we will refer back to the Russian revolution. Sections of the Russian aristocracy of labour were led by the Mensheviks and therefore opposed the October revolution. In particular the telegraphists and the railway workers supported the Provisional Government, and used their position to disrupt the decisions of the Soviets. The Soviet government then sent troops in, to seize the railways and the telegraph offices. It was unfortunate that highly skilled, politically conscious, and well organised workers, with a long history of trade unionism behind them, should be intimidated by backward peasants with uniforms on their backs; but it was in the long term interests of the entire working class that they should be. If the Soviets had refrained from seizing power until every single section of the workers supported them, there would have been no revolution.

The same law applies in Ireland, the revolution is not invalidated if a section of the working class opposes it. Of course there is a question of scale, the protestant workers in the North of Ireland constitute a majority in that part of Ireland in which the crisis is centred. Nevertheless the working class and its allies on an all-Ireland basis

<sup>1</sup> Interview in 'International' vol. 1, no. 6, Sept/Oct. 1971

are very much stronger and could prevent the protestants from standing in the way of the revolution if they were mobilised.

#### The Only Guarantee

To sum up, none of the formulas which have been tried have succeeded in denting the counter-revolutionary consciousness of the protestant workers, and other proposed strategies have major flaws in them. To fight the Irish revolution in face of the hostility of these workers would be terrible and costly, but it may be necessary; and it could be weighed against the implications of allowing the Six County state to go on for another fifty years. The only guarantee is to face the protestants with a strong, united Irish working class, with the small farmers, and the other anti-imperialist forces behind them. The less the chance of subverting the revolution the less will be the resistance.

#### Ireland, Britain and the World

Over one hundred years ago Marx forecast that the liberation of Ireland was pre-condition for the liberation of the British working class. Events have proved him right. The response to the Irish struggle in Britain has so far been minimal; from the Communist Party rightwards there is a consensus in favour of keeping the troops in Ireland. Even the revolutionary left has been sluggish in its response, and one section has even gone so far as to defend the presence of the troops between August '69 and July '70. This reflects the deep chauvinism within the British working class, nurtured for over a century by the fruits of the Empire. The struggle in solidarity with the Irish revolution is part of the struggle to break the British working class from its reactionary slumber.

The Irish struggle will forge ahead, it can break the hold of British Imperialism, and in breaking that hold will deal a death blow to its oldest oppressor. The struggle now going on in Ireland will be recorded as only the latest, episode in an epic struggle which has been in the very vanguard of the fight for human progress. And for future generations the Starry Plough of the Irish revolution will be seen with, the Hammer and Sickle of the Russian revolution as heroic symbols of the world revolution.

It is only fitting that James Connolly should have the last word:

"Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."  
("Irish Worker", August 8, 1914.)

**Title:** Ireland Unfree

**Organisation:** International Marxist Group

**Author:** Bob Purdie

**Date:** 1972

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit [www.leftarchive.ie](http://www.leftarchive.ie)

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