

SEPTEMBER

Statement by  
Reg Birch  
Chairman (CPB ML)

Published by



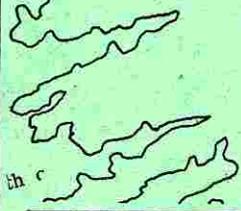
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Published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

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# **Ireland One Nation**

## **Preface**

**Statement by Reg Birch,**

**Chairman of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)**

Published in the WORKER June 13th 1974 on the occasion of the fascist strike enforced by the Ulster Workers Council.

The strike in Belfast by some Irish workers at the call of the Ulster Workers Council is a perverse abuse of the inherent and traditional proletarian working class solidarity which abounds throughout this world, as well as in any place, in Ireland.

Such an action is kindred and similar to that taken in Chile by the so-called Lorry Drivers' Strike -- lorry owners to a man -- against Allende. They are but sheep in wolves' clothing and are troops who in truth lack even the alleged loyalty of the Swiss Guards to the Vatican, for they will surely desert the long-dead Dutchman and that foreign flag of which they prattle on -- the union jack -- when confronted, as they must be, with the might of the Irish people, their vanguard the Irish working class led by an Irish Communist Party Marxist Leninist, in the true struggle necessary -- National Liberation, a Free Ireland. The time is now.

What do they do? They say they wish to put down Sunningdale. Sunningdale is a leaf in the wind which will shrivel and has no consequence for the Irish people. Only in a land occupied by English imperialism for 800 years could such a confusion exist. Nowhere else in the world for the sake of two imperialisms could there be the legend of a superstitious religious war. There is but one Cause in Ireland -- a united Ireland without the foreign occupier.

They, the UWC, prostitute the great strength of the workers in defence of the union jack and the foreign ruler, English imperialism. They truly are but friends of the mercenary thugs. Volunteers to a man, to crush a people. English footmen of imperialism. They do not stand in conflict with them at all. Their action is near-fascist and equates with the extremism of the provisionals who do not make war upon imperialism but on babies, children and mothers.

Neither English imperialism nor yet the Pope is the answer for the Irish people. I call upon all my friends, old friends, members yet (how sad!) of a foreign revisionist party, the CPGB, to throw away their illusions and their slavishness. Rest on the Irish people who are of the best sons of the Irish working class. Take the cream of them, be it in Belfast or Dublin or any other small corner of that beautiful land, and build a true Marxist-Leninist Party for Ireland - emerge!

Far be it from me, with the confusion and reaction in England, to preach. One task is clear to us all -- independence. You alone can lead the way in your own realm, it is yours. There are many warriors, true sons of Ireland, to join the battle. Out with the invader, be it from Westminster or the Vatican, and all their servants resident, willing or unwitting.

**STRIKE AGAINST BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN IRELAND! ALL OUT TO KICK OUT BRITISH TROOPS!**

## Introduction 1

During 1968-69 a great mass movement of the people of northern Ireland began to emerge. Centred round the Civil Rights campaign it culminated in the August 1969 uprising threatening the Stormont regime. When the Royal Ulster Constabulary, with its guns and bullets, professional ruthlessness and thuggery, failed to hold back the people of Derry and Belfast, the troops were sent into the streets.

With the exception of our party, the CPB(M-L) all political organisations, and especially the so-called "left", welcomed the introduction of British troops.

The British army introduced a more disciplined system of terror and murder. After all British troops had had their apprenticeship in such places as Malaya, Cyprus and Aden. Extreme forms of repression were introduced ranging from detention without trial, torture, to murder in the streets. In the wake of the army, British imperialism has attempted to concoct a coalition, power sharing (where the British government shares out its Ulster ministries and offices among its Irish lieutenants), Sunningdale and the like and even talks of reducing the number of troops in the streets.

The Sunningdale agreement, the referendum, elections, coalitions are irrelevant. The question of northern Ireland has been and remains a colonial question. A 'Protestant/Catholic division' is convenient for British imperialism, for the loyalists as well as for some of those who proclaim themselves Republicans, but it has nothing to do with the reality of the situation.

It is a question of imperialist occupation and exploitation by Britain of part of Ireland. It is of no consequence whether such control is achieved through a 'Stormont regime', an 'assembly', a 'coalition', or through direct rule.

The working class of Ireland will have to reassert its leadership of the republican anti-imperialist movement as it did in the days of Connolly. For us, the British working class, the task is to demand the withdrawal of troops from Ireland. To the extent that we do not do this and fail to pronounce our support for the people of Ireland, to that extent we share in the responsibility for the imperialist atrocities in northern Ireland.

## August uprising shakes Britain's hold <sup>2</sup>

The August uprising in Bogside, in Belfast and in a dozen other northern Ireland communities marked the end of a long campaign. The campaign started with peaceful marches for Civil Rights. It ended with great mass turbulence that required a British occupation army, nearly 10,000 strong, to hold the people down. A glorious new chapter had been added to the age-old story of Ireland's struggle for liberation from British rule, reunification of her divided land, and social justice. Ireland is still not free, and even greater struggles can be expected. August showed that the Irish revolutionary tradition is still very much alive and that the days of British rule in Ireland are numbered.

The recent campaign began with demands for electoral reforms (such as one-man-one-vote in local elections) and for an end to discrimination against Catholics in jobs and housing. Its members at first were largely middle class liberals, along with students who added to the demands their own empty calls for socialism. Its tactics were non-violent protest marches combined with requests for assistance from the British Government.

Although a movement with little mass participation and incapable of challenging British rule in northern Ireland, it met with brutal repression from the local authorities. This soon began to win it the mass support it had so far lacked. In August 1968 the police harassed a peaceful march in order to keep the marchers away from the town centre of Dungannon. In October police attacked marchers in Derry with batons and water cannon. In January a peaceful march across northern Ireland was ambushed at Burntollet Bridge in County Derry by armed thugs, many of them police out of uniform. In April a sit-down demonstration in Derry was broken up by police and assistant thugs with such barbarity that even hardened press reporters from London expressed their shock and disgust. Meanwhile the Special Powers Act (praised by South African Prime Minister, Vorster), which allows for arrest without warrant and detention without trial for an indefinite period, was supplemented by a revised Public Order Act which made even the various non-violent forms of protest illegal.

New tactics emerged as the movement gained an increasingly mass character. Water pipelines were blown up. More militancy was

shown in demonstrations. Workers and poor farmers, now entering the movement, brought with them the revolutionary republican heritage of the Irish people. The political illusions of the Civil Rights movement began to evaporate -- the illusions that the British imperialist government is the people's friend, that non-violence can free a people held down by violence, or that socialism can be built in a land divided and dominated by foreign imperialism. In response to this new mood the British garrison in northern Ireland was increased to 5,000 men by April 21st. These were assigned to patrol "essential key installations in rural areas", according to the Defence Ministry, not yet to aid the police against the demonstrators.

August saw the movement reach an altogether higher stage. First in Belfast, then on the other side of Ulster in the Bogside ghetto of Derry, then in Belfast again and all over northern Ireland the people rose up, to be met with gas and bullets by the police. Belfast added several names to the roll-call of Irish revolutionary martyrs. When the police could no longer hold the people in check (by their own admission they had suffered 800 casualties since October) British troops, now increased to 6,600, were called into the cities. By August 20th the Times could write, "The British Government last night virtually took over responsibility for preserving law and order in northern Ireland."

The people of northern Ireland are now face to face with the British imperialist state, in the form of the Army, which has steadily increased in size since August and is now planning for a permanent occupation. To the people it is now very clear that the system which denies them votes, jobs and houses, the system which divides their country and holds it divided now, is British imperialism. None of these wrongs can be righted until British imperialism is driven out of Ireland. Only the Irish people can free Ireland.

### **British troops out of Ireland! <sup>3</sup>**

- British troops are in northern Ireland - nearly 10,000 of them: to bring peace?
- When have British troops brought peace to any part of the empire? Not in Malaya, not in Kenya, not in Borneo, not in Aden.
- The role of British troops has always been to suppress the struggles of the people against British imperialism.

- The Labour Government is the agent of British imperialism. Wilson sends troops to northern Ireland to save Britain's puppet government thereby crushing popular revolt.
- British troops are in northern Ireland to maintain imperialist exploitation of Britain's oldest colony. They are there to safeguard the partition of Ireland on the old imperialist principle of divide and rule.
- The presence of British troops makes it clear to the people of northern Ireland that the real oppressive power is based in London not at Stormont.
- The British imperialist government props up the decrepit, fascist regime of Chichester Clark. If that regime is to be overthrown, British imperialism, the cause of all Ireland's ills, must be expelled.
- Out with British troops! Out with British rule! Out with British control of the economy of northern Ireland!
- There will not be jobs nor housing nor civil rights for all - let alone socialism-while the leech of British imperialism clings on in northern Ireland.
- Outside Europe many colonial peoples have joined together and risen up to drive British imperialism out.
- The Irish people are on the march toward reunification and the liberation of Ireland from imperialist domination.
- Only a united people will succeed in getting Britain out. Great strides toward unity have been taken in northern Ireland during the past year, but religious divisions remain. They are the secret weapon of British imperialism which it does all in its power to foment
- More and more protestant workers recognise this and realise that the independence of northern Ireland is a myth and a sham. They see that the price of privileges over the catholics is a British military dictatorship.
- Irish workers, both catholic and protestant, are becoming aware that the common object of their hostility must be British imperialism and its occupying force.
- The thousands of Irish workers in Britain will not stand idly by while their brothers at home are grappling with the forces of British imperialism.
- We call on all workers in Britain to show their solidarity with

- their Irish working class brothers - both here and in Ireland.
- The Wilson government which has sent troops to northern Ireland is the same government which has launched an all-out attack on the workers of Britain.
  - Down with the imperialist labour government which is the enemy of workers everywhere!
  - Long live the struggle of the Irish people which will surely end for all time the centuries-old murder and enslavement of British imperialism.

## The conquest of Ireland

"Class lines, on the other hand, were far more strictly drawn than religious lines, as they always were in Ireland since the break up of the clan system, and as they are to this day." (James Connolly, "Labour in Irish History")

What distinguishes the progressive from the reactionary in Ireland today is the attitude to religious differences. Indeed, this is the acid test for any organisation that claims to speak for the people of Ireland.

While religious affiliation had its economic roots in the early stages of the occupation of Ireland by England, it lost its significance when the Cromwellian army destroyed the indigenous tribal system and brought the conquest of Ireland to its completion. No sooner had the conquest been completed than the subjugation and exploitation of the people of Ireland, including those who had settled in Ireland from England and Scotland, began in a most barbarous fashion.

Until 1649, the basis of Irish society, both politically and socially rested upon the communal or tribal ownership of land. The Irish chief held his position only upon the sufferance of his people while the land belonging to the clan was entirely removed from his private jurisdiction. The early conquest of Ireland by the English had consisted in occupying the areas around Dublin, the "pale". For centuries the invaders could not venture beyond this without a large army.

The conquest of Ireland proper began with the birth of capitalism in England. When the English Bourgeois Revolution was concluded with the execution of Charles I the victorious bourgeoisie, now

converted to Protestantism, completed the occupation of Ireland under the Cromwellian armies, financed by the commercial banks.

The Irish peasants were driven out of their land and tens of thousands were sold into slavery. The common English Protestant soldier who settled on the land, confiscated from the Catholic Irish peasant, found himself a mere tenant, dependent on the English bankers and gentry. "The Catholic dispossessed by force, the Protestant dispossessed by fraud. Each hating and blaming the other, a situation which the dominant aristocracy knew well how, as their descendants know today, to profit by to their advantage." (Connolly, "The Re-Conquest of Ireland"). Thus began the history of Irish subjugation at the hands of the English bourgeoisie.

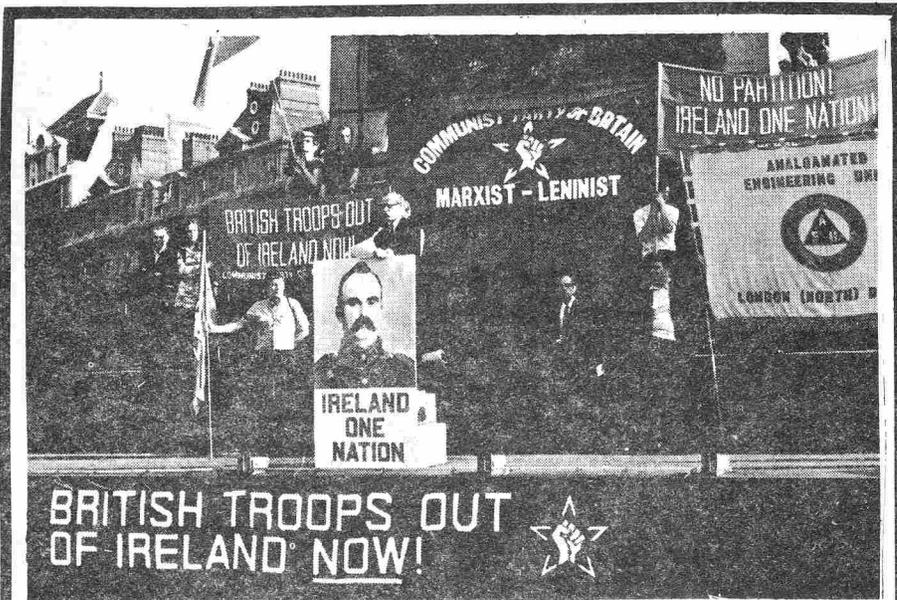
Although the descendants of those men and women who settled in Ireland became an integral part of Ireland and the Irish people, the fear of the original inhabitants is kept alive under the false banner of Catholic and Protestant. The Battle of the Boyne and the Williamite wars of 1691, the legend of which is revived continuously by the imperialist propagandists as well as by the Catholic and Protestant fanatics, had nothing to do with the religious affiliation of the combatants. The battle between William of Orange and King James II was for the possession of power in England, with Ireland thrown in as the booty for the victor. The Protestant, William of Orange, was in fact supported by His Holiness, the Pope, who paid part of the expenses of the Battle of the Boyne.

"Only in a land occupied by English imperialism for 800 years could such confusion exist. Nowhere else in the world could there be the legend of a superstitious religious war."

## **The re-conquest of Ireland**

"The revolutionists of the past were wiser, the Irish Socialists are wiser to-day. In their movement the North and South will again clasp hands, again will it be demonstrated as in '98 that the pressure of a common exploitation can make enthusiastic rebels out of a Protestant working class, earnest champions of civil and religious liberty out of Catholics, and out of both a united social democracy."

(Connolly, "Labour in Irish History")



"Now is the testing time of workers here. We cannot be free ourselves except we fight for the freedom of Irish workers as they are fighting for us.

"What shall we do? We call for the withdrawal of all troops--the Stormont Ku Klux Klan, the imperialist forces, the special Ulster 'defence' body, the lot. All workers here, the whole labour movement, all the unions, must support this demand.

"British soldiers were sent into Ulster by the Labour Government. Their policy of aggression was endorsed by the Tory Government. General Freeland gave the orders 'shoot to kill'. This brought about the armed struggle of people in defence of their homes, their families.

"We as a Party say let us end this chapter in the history of British imperialism now! Let the workers of this country say once and for all--Get the troops out of Ireland. Let the Irish people decide their own destiny themselves."

From a speech at the Trafalgar Square Rally organised by the CPB(ML), September 5th, 1971. 4

Britain's domination of Ireland began 800 years ago. Not long before that Ireland's culture had been among the most advanced in Europe and Ireland had been famous for its gold and its poets. The British invasion put paid to all this. Although the Irish succeeded for a time in confining British rule to a small area around Dublin, the history of Ireland, thenceforth was to be a history of the fight for freedom from Britain. From the 15th century to today the people of Ireland have been in rebellion against Britain's colonial rule.

There were the peasant revolts of the 16th and 17th centuries with secret organisations to fight landlords, enforced labour taxes and other oppressive measures. When arrested the Irish rebels were treated with the greatest cruelty by the foreign ruler.

There were the Volunteers of the 18th century: the people publicly arming themselves and forming volunteer corps throughout the country. When the British government was busy trying to hold on to the colonies in America during the American War of Independence, the Volunteers won their demand for free trade by threatening to use arms. However, when they turned their attention to their political and social grievances, they were betrayed by the Irish bourgeoisie who saw in an armed populace a greater enemy than in the foreign invader.

Then, in the wake of the French Revolution, came the United Irishman movement led by Wolfe Tone. The movement united the Irish people regardless of religion in a manner never seen before. It quickly spread throughout the country with volunteer forces established everywhere. Insurrections were organised in several places. They fought and defeated the British troops on a score of battlefields. However, the lack of communications between one insurrection and another helped the British to isolate and defeat them.

The aftermath of the United Irishman movement of 1798 was more distinctly democratic, international and popular in its sympathies and affiliations. The Emmett Conspiracy recruits came mainly from the working class of Dublin and other large centres as well as from amongst the labouring elements of the country. Their planned armed revolt was only foiled by the betrayal of one of their number a few days before the revolt was to begin.

In the 19th century there were the great peasant revolts throughout the 1820's, 1830's and 1840's. Secret societies were formed to protect the tenants from wholesale eviction by the landlords who

found more profit in turning their arable land into grazing farms. There was the Tithes war which resulted in abolishing the tithes system. Throughout, the Irish peasants were denounced by the church and the newly emancipated Catholic rich as "traitors to the cause of liberty of Ireland."

The 19th century also witnessed the rise of trade unionism in Ireland. Trade guilds were organised as early as the Reformation. "The Catholic and Protestant workmen who were excluded from guild membership (only Episcopalianians were eligible) did organise themselves and it was their trade unions which dominated the labour world to the wrath of the capitalists and landlords and the chagrin of the Government." (Connolly, op. cit).

Every political movement of the Irish people was preceded by unrest among the organised working class. These struggles provided the revolutionary spirit for the Irish national struggle to liberate Ireland from English domination. This was true for the revolutionary period of 1798, the Land League campaign for land reform in 1878 and the Home Rule struggles of the turn of the century and early 20th century. The struggle reached its highest level with Connolly and his Citizen Army. Here we have a working class revolutionary movement, led by Marxist ideology.

The Home Rule campaign continued after the end of the First World War despite the failure of the Easter uprising and the murder of all its leaders and the brutal execution of Connolly. But Britain was not going to relinquish its hold over its oldest colony. Ireland was mutilated at the end of 1920. The six northern counties were amputated from the Irish nation and remain to this day a British colony.

Today the struggle is national liberation, freedom from the British yoke. "There is but one cause in Ireland -- a united Ireland without the foreign occupier." Having divided Ireland, British imperialism is determined to sustain its partition. It sends troops into northern Ireland when its puppet Ulster regime is threatened by the Irish mass movement. It fosters religious differences and ensures the continuance of a system of terror. Such terror stems from British troops, the loyalist fascist gangs and their counterpart, the provisionals who daily murder Irish men and women, children and babies without any compassion.

For centuries the Irish working class has been plagued by the

direct occupation by Britain and the indirect invasion by the Vatican. Each supplements the other causing misery for the Irish people.

The way ahead is clear. If it was clear to Connolly and his Citizen Army in 1916, it must surely be clear in 1975. Those who today wave the union jack will be the first to desert that foreign flag just as the provisional extremists will sink into insignificance when confronted by the might of the Irish working class.

"Out with the invader, be it from Westminster or the Vatican, and all their servants resident, willing or unwitting."

## **Reaction abroad breeds reaction at home** <sup>5</sup>

Introduction of the Act entitled 'Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provision)' is ostensibly aimed at those perpetrators of the cruel senseless, wanton violence against the civil population here in Britain. But no-one should be fooled by its temporary specious nature. In truth, it is a further attack upon civil liberties and the right of freedom here. Neither will it do anything to stop these mad cowboys who are now characterised as the IRA - for which there is no evidence. Though we did believe it was a break-away section, self-styled provisionals, who carry out these senseless acts.

This Government and its spokesmen should never be underestimated. They have already made claim in the divided cry to bring back hanging that such would not end stupid and cruel acts. Indeed they have suggested that such would accelerate. We agree with this, But since this is true and from their own mouth they equally know that this law will do nothing to stop the non-political waging of war on a civil population here in Britain

The word 'terrorism' has ever been used and abused as a perjorative term by imperialism throughout the world. The imperialists themselves are the most guilty of terrorism in all history. But everybody knows, who has any political sense whatsoever, that acts of terrorism in the true political sense do nothing at all to advance the cause of freedom and of liberation.

It is self-evident that all nations shall be free and independent and that acts of oppression, a people's war, may have to be waged to eject the aggressor, the occupier, the imperialist force. But to ape the methods of cruelty and export the lessons learned by the aggressor back to the place from whence they came only underlines that

reaction abroad breeds reactions at home and that this law is reaction in the extreme against the people and their civil freedom.

That the British people have permitted the perpetual occupation of Ireland, have neither fought sufficiently nor campaigned for the freedom of the Irish people is a deficiency for which they now suffer. Ireland is one nation. The people of Ireland must fight for national liberation, must struggle in their homeland for freedom and unity of Ireland. That is their Cause. It is our duty here to demand the exodus of British troops from that part of Ireland artifiically partitioned. Such partition brings about the stupidity and the problem that the Irish people and the British people now suffer.

The British people must struggle for the repeal of this pernicious Act in their own interest, not to condone imported violence but as part of the struggle that all men shall be free. We must insist that the first step in the solution of this problem is that British troops must be out of Ireland. It is for the Irish people alone to resolve the difficulties that are resident there. They must secure unity and independence as one nation.

To use the Act, self-styled as Draconian, in specious protection of British society is a lie, for it will yet be used, unless it be abolished, against the struggle of the British people here, and above all, the British working class, in their need to rid themselves of the ruling class here who are the exponents, the acme, of imperialism in Ireland. For a Labour Government on the suffering of ordinary people, the maiming and the killings as in Birmingham, to extend police powers here in England is not only hypocrisy but downright oppression. Those measures against the Irish people in the name of British imperialism in northern Ireland today not only stem from here in England and in our name but will be used against ourselves if we tolerate such things.

No people can be free themselves if they permit the oppression and lack of freedom of other workers in other lands. Let us not be pushed into a situation that in the name of the law we shall be abused as defenders of those cowards who instead of fighting for freedom for Ireland seek to terrify our own home because there is a law. But neither let us in panic and hysteria believe that the British Government through all history has ever been sincere in the desire for the unity of Ireland. This can and will be achieved by the Irish people alone. They can do so the quicker, the sooner, we here insist on the

Government withdrawing the British Forces from Ireland. An end to artificial partition, an end to aggression against the Irish people.

Down with all who seek to frighten us here either by law or by cowardly indiscriminate acts of violence. Both are synonymous in philosophical intent though the one may operate under the law of the land in the name of armed might. Both abuse and operate against the social law, the law of freedom itself.

It is lack of political understanding and inability to have faith of revolutionary cause, that of freedom itself, to respond by sneaking little letter bombs, to seek to blackmail and terrify the innocent citizen by surreptitious placing of parcels in the market place of the working class.

The British working class will not be frightened either by unjust law or by senseless killing. But they must gird their loins in struggle for their own freedom, understand that this is an equal thing, that all men shall have liberty, all shall have dignity that no foreign aggressor shall occupy a land and that we can only be free when all are. And this cannot be so if in our indifference, in our political cowardice or even in our fear, we permit others to bully our Irish brothers and sisters.

"The Worker" Dec. 13th 1974

## Conclusion

"... it is the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland."

(Karl Marx)

British imperialism might have lost most of its teeth. Nonetheless it finds enough strength to enforce its occupation of northern Ireland. Its recent action of sending troops into northern Ireland is as vicious as any of its previous oppressive acts. The purpose is to destroy any opposition to British colonial rule. Nothing is spared. The experience of the armed forces in fighting the peoples of Malaya, Kenya, Aden and other places is brought into play.

Harassment, arrests, torture, murder, indiscriminate shooting have been the order of the day. A series of schemes followed the sending in of the troops. Chichester Clark was replaced by Faulkner,

the puppet "Stormont" substituted by "direct rule", "Sunningdale", "power-sharing" and now again, "direct-rule". By the threat of arms the British army ensures the separation of Catholics and Protestants Residents are threatened, husbands and brothers arrested and interned without trial, houses searched at all times of day and night, young people murdered. In general, families have been terrorised and driven out of their homes to divide Catholic from Protestant.

If the question of religion distinguishes progressive from reactionary in Ireland, here in Britain the question of British domination of Ireland distinguishes the genuine from the fraudulent left. On one side are all political parties except CPB(ML). That Britain should rule Ireland is never under dispute by the major spokesmen of British imperialism, labour, tory or anything else. As for those who claim to speak for the working class, the revisionist CPGB and the variety of Trotskyite organisations, all true sons of social democracy, they rally in defence of British imperialism at its hour of need and gave support for the sending of troops into northern Ireland.

Our task in Britain is very clear; to demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. However we disclaim it, we are part of the oppression of Irish workers. Only when we can effect the withdrawal of the troops, that Ireland may be one and free, may we the British working class truly fight for our freedom.

"Then out from the fields and the city  
from workshop, from mill and from mine,  
Despising their wrath and their pity,  
we workers are moving in line,  
To answer the watchword and token  
that Labour gives forth as its own,  
Nor pause till our fetters we've broken,  
and conquered the spoiler and drone .."  
(Connolly)

## NOTES

1. First appeared in the WORKER May 1st, 1974
2. First appeared in a Broadsheet on Ireland published by the CPB(ML) August 1969.
3. Statement by the CPB(ML), August 1969 on the sending of British troops into Ireland.
4. On Sunday September 5, 1971 more than a thousand workers marched through the centre of London to join an even larger crowd in Trafalgar Square to demand the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. This unique demonstration was organised by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)-- an event of great political significance.
5. First appeared in the WORKER on December 13th, 1974 following the passage of the "Prevention of Terrorism Act" by the British Government.

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**Printed and published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist),  
155 Fortess Road, London NW5.**

**Title:** Ireland One Nation

**Organisation:** Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

**Author:** Reg Birch

**Date:** 1974

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