

INTRODUCTION

In June 1987, the National Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Ireland sent an Open Letter to the Provisional IRA (pages 1 and 2 of this pamphlet). The reason for this is explained in its contents.

In July 1987, we published this Open Letter in the CPI Press — UNITY and the Irish Socialist — asking all who were interested : organizations and individuals to express their opinions. We guaranteed that all contributions would be published in full in our newspapers. This pamphlet contains these submissions — without editing.

The CPI would like to thank all who participated in this discussion, which we view as a serious opening contribution to a very serious question — the future for the common people of this island.

Therefore the CPI considers that it is important that this collection of ideas should be published in the hope that it will encourage further discussion and lead to concrete, united action in the struggle to win an Ireland — FREE — UNITED — INDEPENDENT AND SOCIALIST.

James Stewart
General Secretary,
Communist Party of Ireland.

Published, June, 1988.

Open letter from the Communist Party of Ireland to the Provisional IRA

The Communist Party of Ireland is a revolutionary socialist organization pledged to end British imperialist rule and all imperialist influence in Ireland, with the clear objective of building a united socialist republic in our island.

Our declared policy is to work for the creation of a united political campaign which would force the British Government to declare its intent to withdraw from all interference in Ireland — political, military and economic, by a specific date, which would be accompanied by a transition period to a point when the role of Government would be taken over by a sovereign government elected from all parts of Ireland on the basis of a new Constitution which would include a guarantee of fundamental civil, religious and democratic rights for all sections of our people.

In every significant struggle of the Irish people for social, political and national liberation, our Communist Party since its foundation date in 1933 has played an active part. Our Party is not opposed in principle to armed struggle. Indeed many of our members have taken up arms in the struggle for Ireland's independence and against Fascism in Ireland, Spain and during World War II.

But from the sum total of our experience, and our knowledge based on Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory, we came to the conclusion that armed struggle which does not have popular support amongst the majority of our oppressed people cannot defeat imperialism and oppression.

Many years ago the most famous and most successful revolutionary of all time, Lenin, came to the same conclusion when his brother was executed for attempted political assassination. "There is another way", he said, and proved later in practice that there was — the way of militant unity between workers and small farmers and all exploited sections of society.

Finding that way in our partitioned island with its imperialist fostered sectarian divisions is no easy task — but that way must be found. As we have consistently pointed out we do not agree with the form of struggle conducted by the Provisional IRA — because it does not advance the necessary unity of class forces which is basic to the achievement of Ireland's unity and independence from all forms of imperialist domination. On the contrary, it is increasingly degenerating into a more and more sectarian armed campaign.

The reality is, British imperialism is not reeling from the blows inflicted by the Provisional IRA's

campaign, on the contrary, over the last period it has taken the initiative in trying to tie the whole of Ireland more firmly into the world imperialist system headed by the USA through NATO and the multinationals.

On the European level, the Single European Act makes clearer, the increasing cohesion of the EEC as an imperialist bloc with military, as well as economic and political significance. The neutrality of the Irish Republic is a standing affront to imperialism and efforts to subvert it are being made daily.

In the global strategy of imperialism the specific responsibility of British imperialism is, of course, to further subordinate and subdue the whole island of Ireland. Its current mechanism is the Anglo-Irish Agreement which has forged a new series of alliances with bourgeois nationalism (North and South) and which, at a stroke, dramatically reduces the autonomy and sovereignty of the only sovereign state on Irish soil.

It fully involves the Government of the Republic in the British policy of repression in the North, allowing Dublin simply to ask for a little trimming around the edges. It means in practice that Irish security forces are committed to taking orders from the British authorities on the Border and elsewhere. The Hillsborough Treaty is a disaster for the movement of Irish liberation.

The opposition of the Unionists to the Agreement does not change this analysis. They are being coerced by the British Government into accepting a junior partnership in the new system of pro-imperialist alliances that now covers the whole of our island. They do not like it and are complaining. That does not mean that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is good for nationally-minded people or any section of our working people.

As far as the Anglo-Irish Agreement is concerned, the first reaction of the Fianna Fail Government to the assassination of Judge Gibson and his wife was to pledge ever more "cross border cooperation". It is a peculiar Republican strategy that provokes ever more active collaboration by a sovereign Irish Government with British imperialism.

Moreover, this year's Provisional IRA's actions have not weakened the commitment of the British state to the Hillsborough Treaty one iota. True, the loud complaints of the Unionists that the Agreement has not brought law and order may get a better hearing around the fringes of British politics. But the leading circles of the British

state are unmoved. Even Fleet Street, usually so ready to adopt a racist anti-Irish tone at any opportunity was remarkably subdued after Gibson's killing. The reason? — The Irish Republic is now seen as an ally of British imperialism! In spite of the usefulness of yet another racistist division in Britain, the Anglo-Irish Agreement is too important to be put under threat.

Indeed, the circumstances surrounding the Gibson killings should raise some serious questions for your movement. It set the scene for the well-planned SAS ambush and slaughter of eight IRA men and one civilian in Loughgall.

The question must be asked: was the Loughgall massacre a deliberate act by the British authorities and their intelligence forces to ensure that any PIRA moves towards calling a truce would be successfully sabotaged?

Certainly the response of the British Government to the Gibson killing has been more repression in the form of SAS killer squads with the possibility of selective internment being put on the agenda once again. In whose interests is that? Those who believe that the more repression there is, the more revolutionary people become, fail to understand the experience of liberation movements all over the world and also the lessons of the past 15 years.

There are many lessons to be learned from the rich experiences of the world's national liberation movements. Such as not alone the tenacity of the Vietnamese but their political wisdom which set out to destroy the US imperialist strategy of "Vietnamization" of the struggle of that country.

The reality is that what you see as "undermining Ulsterization" is seen by the Protestant section of the community — and many outside it — as a straightforward sectarian campaign. You cannot imagine that such actions can do anything but breed and foster even more sectarian division for the future. What is more, you have expanded the ranks of so-called "collaborators" to include thousands of working people whose job brings them into some contact with state forces.

When whole categories of people are suddenly declared "legitimate targets" who do you expect them to support, the "security forces" who promise to protect them, or the "forces of liberation" who threaten to kill them?

It is in this way that your concept of the Irish nation becomes progressively more exclusive ending up in fact with a view of the "nationalist people" that includes only your own supporters. Consider how far you have moved from Wolfe Tone's generous and inclusive definition of the Irish people.

Take another experience — the African National Congress (ANC). It clearly stands for the unity of Black and White (Catholic and Protestant parallel?) and is doing everything to win the maximum support of the White minority because its objective is a free democratic South Africa which will embrace both forces. Can it be honestly stated that your activities and practice, as distinct from words, contribute to an effort to win over the maximum support of the Protestant section of the people in the

North?

The fundamental principle of all successful anti-imperialist struggle is that it must be democratic. It is the people of the subject country against the foreign imperialist state. In Irish terms it is the democratic principle of the Republican ideal which was formulated by Wolfe Tone:

"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 past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denomination of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter — these were my means."



We have to state without any equivocation that we cannot achieve these objects without these means. You cannot defeat imperialism without developing united action by the working class. Democracy in the anti-imperialist struggle must mean mobilization of the mass of all sections of the working people, North and South, Catholic and Protestant.

In addressing this appeal to you to stop your military campaign we would like to make another point. For the past few years you have been pursuing a policy of combining electoral policies with military action. But that policy which with a united working class could promise so much, has proved in our conditions to be impracticable.

You have a level of electoral support in the North through Sinn Fein, but it has already been diminished by the pro-Anglo-Irish Agreement "nationalists" of the SDLP in the recent Westminster elections. In the South the general election results for Sinn Fein must have been gravely disappointing. Yet the decision to abandon abstentionism cost dear. The Army Convention held before the Ard Fheis (the first since 1970) agreed with the decision but evidently, as subsequent events have shown, at the price of freedom of military action.

But the escalation of the PIRA armed campaign has helped to get Unionism off the hook in the conditions of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and given it a vehicle which helps it to arrest its decline and disin-

tegration.

The PIRA seem to have ignored that basic military principle — "never interfere with the enemy when he is in the process of destroying himself." As the Westminster elections have underlined, the Unionists are in disarray, their politicians falling out and their support amongst the grassroots of the Protestant section of the working people diminishing.

Republicans who claim to be the followers of Wolfe Tone and James Connolly must seek to find the way and the means of finding a common language with the Protestant section of the Irish working people.

Contact between Republican and Loyalist forces who are both seeking a way forward out of the crisis and suffering created by British imperialism could at the very minimum create conditions which could lead to a halt to the vicious spiral of sectarian violence which claims as its victims a majority of working class people — Catholic and Protestant.

And it could put us on the path to achieve the objective of Tone and Connolly.

The reality is that your armed campaign in current Irish conditions is not only an obstacle to progress generally, but also cripples your political movement's capacity for radical political advance in the struggle against British imperialism.

The Communist Party of Ireland makes this appeal to you from a political anti-imperialist position to declare an immediate cessation to your armed activities in all aspects and to instead make your positive contribution to the essential revolutionary task of working constantly to unite the working people, to build a mass anti-imperialist movement led by a united working class — to unite and free our people from all vestiges of imperialist rule, interference and influence.

We await with concern and interest your reply to our appeal.

July, 1987.

Sinn Fein members reply to the C.P.I. Open Letter

A chomráidithe: This letter has been written by Sinn Fein members in response to the Communist Party of Ireland's "open letter" to the Irish Republican Army. We do not presume to speak for the IRA, but we would like to continue the debate in the hope that other socialists will come to better understand our struggle for national liberation and a democratic socialist republic.

Dear comrades, We found your letter to be confused and contradictory. It was heavy in its condemnation of the armed struggle, but light and airy in its alternatives. Whilst we note that the CPI is "not opposed in principle to armed struggle" we feel your rejection of it in Ireland is based on a crude misrepresentation of the IRA's strategy and has little to do with revolutionary theory.

Your central reasoning seems to be that the IRA's struggle "does not advance the necessary unity of class forces that is basic to the achievement of Ireland's unity and independence from all forms of imperialist domination" because it "is seen by the Protestant section of the community — and many outside it — as a straightforward sectarian campaign." This suggests a deep misunderstanding of the nature of loyalism, partition, and the sectarian state to which it gave rise.

James Connolly's warning that partition would bring "a carnival of reaction" has been amply proved in the years since 1921. Periodic pogroms of nationalist areas, combined with systematic discrimination, have created one of the world's most reactionary states. Direct British rule has changed virtually nothing for the nationalist community, a large section of which supports Sinn Fein.

Over the centuries, Protestant workers and farmers have been taught that loyalty to the British crown guaranteed them marginal privileges over their Catholic neighbours. Loyalism has thus become hopelessly entangled with the British state's military presence in Ireland, creating a colonialist aristocracy of labour to a large degree dependent



on the British military machine for employment.

Before loyalist workers can ever discover their real class interests, that military machine must be destroyed. Any attempt to delay struggle until the majority of loyalists allow the scales of imperialism to drop from their eyes is badly misjudged.

REACTIONARY

The ideology of the loyalist working class is without doubt one of the most reactionary in Europe, if not the world. It has always vigorously supported the state's oppression of Catholics, and is likely to explode with anger at the slightest moves to end discrimination.

It can be no wonder that such a community will see a war directed against the state forces (the RUC and the British Army with its discredited UDR) as a war against itself. But we are deeply saddened to see otherwise progressive forces such as yourselves giving such views credence.

Only when the source of loyalism — the discriminatory and oppressive Six-County state — is done away with will Catholic and Protestant workers be able to come together in a united working class. Only then will we be able to find "a common language with the Protestant section of the Irish working people."

The class forces necessary for the creation of Irish unity exist now among the non-loyalist workers and farmers throughout Ireland. The aspiration for unity among these nationalists remains alive despite a twenty-year-long ruling-class campaign to extinguish it.

Meanwhile, although loyalism amounts to a not insignificant proportion of the Irish population, it remains concentrated in the north-east of the island and is heavily dependent on the British presence. Revolutionaries should be able to see through the bluster of the Ian Paisleys and the George Seawrights.

TERRORISM

We would remind you that similar threats of pro-imperialist subversion were used in Algeria. The pro-French working class used its industrial strength against the liberation forces and openly supported the fascist-inclined OAS; but the national liberation forces faced up to this challenge and were victorious.

You clearly misunderstand the IRA's strategy if you feel it necessary to remind us of Lenin's objections to the individual acts of terrorism practised in his day by the Narodniks and in our own day by such groups as the Red Brigades. The IRA has repeatedly condemned such actions. You should be able to distinguish between individual terrorism and a campaign with deep support within the Six Counties embattled nationalist communities.

Seventy years ago Lenin distinguished between the armed actions of republicans, which he supported, and those of Narodniks such as his brother, when he wrote of 1916:

"Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will

never live to see it a blow delivered against the British imperialist bourgeois rule by a rebellion in Ireland is of a hundred times greater political significance than a blow of equal weight in Asia or Africa."

You should be warned against superficial denunciations of armed anti-imperialist struggle by the experience of the Cuban Communist Party (PSP). In 1953 when forces under Fidel Castro attacked and nearly over-powered the Moncada barracks of the Batista dictatorship, the PSP denounced the action as a "putsch" and an "adventure", saying that it led "only to failure", the squandering of forces, and useless death." Seven years later, the party's leader, Blas Roca, was forced to eat his words: Castro had come to power in a mass revolution.

Like 1916, the Moncada attack generated mass popular struggle. We would remind you of Lenin's objections to the use of "abstract formulas and rules" in the case of armed struggle. The PSP's denunciation of Castro — like yours of the IRA — was rooted in such dogmatism.

SOUTH AFRICA

Your attempt to use the struggle of the ANC against the IRA is immensely confused. You correctly point out that the ANC "clearly stands for the unity of black and white", but its armed wing is also involved in a military struggle with the South African state forces. Like the IRA, it kills police and army members irrespective of whether they are black or white, Catholic or Protestant. Would you please explain to us how such actions by Umkhonto we Sizwe are revolutionary while those of the IRA are "sectarian"?

We'd respectfully remind you that republicans have at least as distinguished a record in defending the working class as communists. We have repeatedly stated that we're for a united secular Ireland. We note that some of your members are less than enthusiastic about moves to create real employment equality in the Six Counties; a fundamental democratic issue. We're amazed to find some communists opposed to the MacBride Principles, for example, while civil rights lawyers in the United States can give the Principles their full support.

Groups facing the sort of discrimination suffered by Six County nationalist workers have agitated for positive discrimination (an issue not raised in the MacBride Principles) with communist support in many countries, yet we find communists in Ireland who reject positive discrimination as "divisive". It isn't possible to speak of the working class as "united" at present, while a large section of it is excluded from work by religious discrimination.

The letter also expresses serious illusions in the degree of independence exercised by Southern bourgeois politicians since the formation of the 26-County state. The Hillsborough Agreement indeed "dramatically reduces the autonomy and sovereignty" of the 26-County state, but that sovereignty has, since the Whitaker Plan in the early sixties, been little more than nominal.

Since the beginning of this phase of the armed

struggle, 26-County collaboration with the British has been constantly on the increase. Hillsborough was a serious move against the Republican Movement but by no means was it "a disaster for the movement for Irish liberation," a fact borne out by Sinn Fein's electoral results in June.

EXTRAORDINARY

Having exaggerated the degree of 26-County sovereignty before Hillsborough, you go on to draw three extraordinary conclusions about events since then.

The first is to suggest that, because the execution of Judge Gibson provoked "ever more active collaboration with British imperialism," this is a reason for halting IRA operations. The increasing collaboration (well planned in advance) is a natural consequence of any successful operation, as the 26-County puppets are forced into ever more humiliating postures by their British puppeteers. Your logic, if taken in an industrial situation, would mean telling workers, "Don't ever go on strike: it might provoke the bosses."

You then allow your collective imagination to run wild: "Was the Loughgall massacre a deliberate act by the British authorities ...to ensure that any PIRA (sic) moves towards calling a truce would be successfully sabotaged?"

It's a question that doesn't really deserve an answer except to refer you to the many statements by the IRA which deny the possibility of any truce short of a British commitment to withdrawal.

The third of your conclusions is in direct contra-

diction to some of your earlier points. You say that the IRA has "ignored the basic military principle 'never interfere with the enemy when his is in the process of destroying himself.'"

You've already suggested that Hillsborough was a major boost for imperialism, so how then can you say that our enemies are destroying themselves?

In fact you're confusing loyalists — who are deeply divided but aren't the central enemy — with the British state — which is the central enemy and which has consolidated its power through Hillsborough.

The suggestion that the armed struggle "cripples Sinn Fein's capacity for radical advance" is equally off the mark. It has no effect whatsoever on our ability to take radical political positions on other subjects. If what you mean is that the armed struggle damages us electorally, you're also wrong. It's our experience that on working class doorsteps what matters is whether we can get across our political answers to immediate social and economic questions.

Finally, comrades, we'd point to the fact that in our letter there is a sincere attempt to grapple with the points raised in yours. We hope that you will reply in the same way. That would mean dropping the slanderous suggestion that the IRA's struggle is "increasingly degenerating into a sectarian armed campaign" — debate and serious discussion aren't fostered while jibes like that are floating around. Beir bua.

August, 1987.

Reply from the editor of the Irish Socialist

The contribution from the Sinn Fein members is most welcome, both for the comradely tone in which it is written and for the attempt to deal seriously with the points of criticism made by the Communist Party of the Provisional Movement's actions and strategies. It is in that spirit that the debate should continue.

The central fact about the present "armed struggle" is that — unlike Cuba, Algeria, or South Africa, it has clearly failed to generate mass support. Certainly a large element of northern nationalists support the Provisionals — with varying degrees of commitment — but on any serious analysis of Irish politics that element of support is increasingly isolated.

What is contained in the Communist Party's criticisms of Provisional strategy is not illusions about the Protestant section of the Irish people, but an awareness that British imperialism will only be driven from Ireland — and it won't leave any other way — by the combined strength of a united Irish people.

That doesn't mean that every Protestant has to be won for national liberation, any more than every Catholic. But it does mean that key attention must be paid to winning sections of the Protestant population if we really hope to win, rather than just lose gallantly.

STRUGGLE

The second point is that in their letter, the Sinn Fein members seem to imply that if there is no armed struggle, there is no struggle at all. This is not correct. Indeed, the civil rights struggle was not an armed struggle, but it still brought Stormont to its knees.

What the Communist Party is saying is not that armed struggle is morally wrong, but that the present campaign is politically premature. To that extent it prevents other forms of struggle developing. Further, it reinforces the sense of commitment of the Protestant population to the British union, be-

cause the victims are increasingly members of their community.

Few tears are shed about British soldiers being killed, but local Protestants are a different matter — especially when they are workers whose connections with the security forces (sic) are of the most tenuous kind. Indeed, one of the points of the MacBride Principles is that all workers should be guaranteed the right to go to work without threat of being killed for their political or religious affiliation. The Provisionals are in the forefront of those who ignore this principle.

The Communist Party does not suggest that the Provisional volunteers are consciously motivated by sectarianism. We say that their actions have sectarian consequences. At the end of the day, whatever the subjective opinions of participants, it's the objective character of the struggle as determined by its objective consequences that counts.

MACBRIDE PRINCIPLES

One point that must be answered, of course, is the suggestion that the Communist Party is opposed to the MacBride Principles. Nothing could be further from the truth. At its last national congress, the Communist Party welcomed the MacBride Principles as a valuable guideline.

Nor are we opposed to positive discrimination, as evidenced by our very substantial efforts to campaign for the location of new enterprises in areas traditionally discriminated against. But we prefer a flexible approach rather than a rigid one that might be appropriate in Belfast but not in Derry. The key point is to bring about, through struggle, an actual redressing of the imbalance in employment occasioned by sectarian discrimination.

In that struggle, communists have a very proud record. There are of course, many other points that could be taken up, and indeed must be further debated.

August, 1987

Whatever unites our enemies weakens us

BY EOIN O MURCHU

The Communist Party of Ireland's open letter to the Provisionals presented a clear, but fraternal criticism of the current Provisional strategy of armed struggle. It is particularly welcome, however, that members of Sinn Fein should be willing to enter a debate on this vital issue, since the unity of progressive forces — without which no advance can be made by the Irish people — can only come about through frank but comradely discussion and debate on the objects and the means of our struggle.

In that spirit, I would like to take up some of the themes of the debate and answer the main points of the Sinn Fein members' letter. In their reply to the CPI's open letter, the Sinn Fein members have failed to understand the question of building a mass movement before a revolutionary struggle can win. This is not a question of pandering to Protestant prejudice, but a recognition that just as war is an extension of politics by other means, so revolutionary war is an extension of revolutionary politics by other means.

The essence of the Provisional argument seems to be that since British imperialism has divided the Irish people through the marginal (and in some cases not so marginal) privileges given to the Protestant section, the Protestants must be written off.

The Sinn Fein members specifically state: "Only when the source of loyalism — the discriminatory and oppressive Six County state — is done away with will Catholic and Protestant workers be able to come together in a united working class." But this begs the very question: How is the Six-County state — or more appropriately, British imperialism's physical presence in Ireland — to be done away with? Who will sweep it away?

The sad reality is that the Provisionals' campaign is marginal to the Irish people as a whole. Indeed, only a minority of northern nationalists support it, albeit an important and significant minority. The Protestants are totally opposed, and the south is either apathetic or confused.

The arguments seem to be that the "war" as it is grandiosely called, will go on until Britain gets sick of it. But just as the degree of political mobilization has been weak, marginal, divided and ineffective, so too is the "military response." We have long ago reached what Maudling declared as his aim: the acceptable level of violence. What is this "acceptable level of violence", and who is it acceptable to? British imperialism has defined it clearly: an acceptable level of violence involves few if any deaths of British soldiers and no military activity in Britain. Apart from isolated exceptions, this has been achieved.

Bombing campaigns in Britain — apart from the fact that they are totally counter-productive, since they weaken the position of those elements in British labour who support the Irish cause — cannot be sustained. A quick run in and out is the best that can be done.

RARE

In the north itself, it is rare indeed for a British soldier to be killed. The British have "Ulsterized" the casualty figures; yet the Sinn Fein members placidly accept this because "Loyalism has ... become hopelessly entangled with the British state's military presence in Ireland."

The Provisional apologists seem to accept, as the communists charged, that the killing of RUC and UDR men — particularly off duty — is seen by the Protestants as attacks on their community, but just shrug off the political consequences.

Underlying this is the assumption — particularly strong in the Irish tradition — that if there is no armed struggle there is no struggle at all. Of course, this reflects the fact that large sections of the north's Catholics have always been on the fringe of society, denied work and the organization and experience of social struggle that comes with it. Many Provisionals cannot see how you can fight

your enemy unless you can tangibly hit his servants with bombs and bullets.

The Communist Party of Ireland rejects this totally. We reject it from our own experience in the fight for civil rights, and from the experience of the world communist movement, most notably perhaps from our heroic comrades in the South African Communist Party.

I will return to the point about the lessons of international experience; but the civil rights struggle in the north itself is an important illustration of the type of struggle that can bring a state to its knees.

CIVIL RIGHTS

The significance of the civil rights struggle of the 1960s is not that it was unarmed, but that it was a political mobilization of masses of people, as a result of which the contradictions inherent in the sectarian, discrimination-ridden statelet of Northern Ireland could no longer be contained. Above all, Britain was exposed internationally for its responsibility.

In this sense, the Communist Party is not vague about its alternative to the Provisionals' armed campaign. And it is not mere jibing that leads us to characterize the campaign as "degenerating into sectarianism." For it is not the subjective opinions of participants that determine the character of any particular struggle, but its objective political consequences, effects and methods.

So then, in place of a form of struggle that accentuates divisions and plays into the hands of British imperialism, which thrives on setting one section of the Irish people against another, the communists have proposed a multi-faceted struggle, combining political demands in general with particular pressures, economic, social, cultural as well as political.

The central issue is, of course, the demand that Britain declares its intention to withdraw from Ireland. That is the fundamental political demand, and one that the Communist Party shares with the

Provisionals. But alongside that is the obvious fact that the very denial of democracy by which Britain rules in the north is the weak point for imperialism. The struggle against sectarianism in the workplace, the demand for an end to repression, the specific challenges to the use of plastic bullets, the strip-searching practices, the Diplock courts — the whole apparatus of repression — has potential for mobilization that British imperialism rightly fears.

It is worth noting that, for all the problems of trade unionism in northern Ireland, the trade union movement does demand an end to all these practices, and the abolition of the Prevention of Terrorism Act: something on which the British trade union movement, which does not face the same problems, has yet to take such a clear-cut stand.

In this regard also I want to reject the charge made by the Sinn Fein members in their letter that the Communist Party is opposed to the MacBride Principles. Nothing could be further from the truth.

At its last national congress, the Communist Party of Ireland welcomed the MacBride Principles as a valuable guideline in the struggle against sectarianism in the workplace. Communists have used the debate which has arisen over the MacBride Principles to carry the fight against sectarianism in the workplace to every area of Northern Ireland.

Far from opposing them, the communists welcome them. But this does not mean that our struggle is rigidly limited by these principles either. For example, equality of representation in the workforce does not help redress discrimination against Catholics in Derry or West Belfast, where they are in a majority.

But given the need for different approaches in different areas, communists fight very positively for redressing the sectarian imbalances in the labour force in Northern Ireland.

Indeed, this is explicitly recognized by the fascist extremes of unionism which in Short's, for example, have directed their fire against communists. In Short's, as in the shipyard, it is the communists



who have led the fight against sectarianism and, as a result, have been at the direct receiving end of loyalist threats, intimidation and thuggery.

I am proud to say that my comrades have never flinched despite the personal danger to which they are subjected. Time and again they have proved themselves true communists; and no-one has a right to challenge their commitment or record in this regard.

SOUTH

The other key area of struggle obviously concerns the southern state. Communists have no illusions about the collaborationist character of successive Irish governments. We have consistently attacked them for this. But the Twenty-Six County state is the most advanced state, for all its many warts, that the Irish people have so far achieved. And, to a large extent, a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland means transferring sovereignty for that area to the Dublin administration.

Of course, the Communist Party demands more than just that. In putting forward the demand for a British declaration of intent to withdraw, we also want a transitional assembly for the north to begin the process of integration with the south, and structures to allow the Irish people as a whole to create a new constitution for a new state.

The political complexity of the situation in the south is too large a subject to be discussed here. But it is the height of political folly to ignore either the need for or the possibility of winning support for Irish democracy even from within parties like Fianna Fail. Collaboration with British repression should not just be denounced, but efforts made to have it rejected. To fail to struggle is to give in.

I repeat, this is not to have illusions about Fianna Fail's record of putting the class interests of its capitalist backers ahead of the national interests of Irish democracy at all key points. It is just to demand a struggle on the question; and to struggle involves attempting to establish the most favourable circumstances so that that struggle can be won: or, in other words, so that the active mobilization of the Irish people can force a change of policy.

CONDEMN

If the armed struggle helps to weaken our enemy and build our unity, then fair enough. But it does the exact opposite! That is why the communists condemn the Provisional campaign, and not for any

moralistic opposition to armed struggle as such.

On the contrary, Irish communists have never ruled out the right of the Irish people to use armed struggle to win national and social freedom; and we have given real support to many fighting in situations where armed struggle is appropriate, from Algeria to Viet Nam to South Africa.

But the circumstances of none of these struggles can be mechanically imported into Ireland. Their struggles developed always in accordance with their own specific circumstances. But there are some lessons. In South Africa, for example, decades were spent building the mass mobilization of the people in political struggle. The ANC's Freedom Charter had already won mass support before the events at Sharpeville heralded the development of armed struggle in South Africa.

But even now, the SACP and the ANC insist on promoting the concept of the unity of black and white, while striking harder and harder blows against the apartheid regime itself.

In Cuba, while the communists made many mistakes, their role in the overthrow of Batista cannot be ignored, and is not ignored by the Cuban Communist Party today. The last blow in fact to paralyse the Batista regime was the general strike in Havana organized by the PSP. Indeed, at the last congress of the Cuban Communist Party, Fidel Castro himself paid glowing tribute to Blas Roca — a tribute that is a matter of public record.

Our concern, of course, is not with theoretical debates about history, but with the realities of our own struggle.

KEY QUESTION

The key question is this: whatever unites our enemy weakens us; whatever divides our enemy strengthens us. The aim of Irish democrats in their struggle against British imperialism must be to win significant elements of the Protestant population as well as of those who currently support Fianna Fail in the south, to reject imperialism.

The current armed struggle doesn't help us here; and it certainly causes no military concern to British imperialism. At best it is an irrelevance, at worst an obstacle.

The way forward is to struggle on many fronts for our rights, and to win political support in Ireland firstly, but also solidarity support in Britain and internationally for the demand that Britain withdraws from Ireland.

September, 1987.

Difficult to quarrel with the Sinn Fein response

BY MATT MERRIGAN

It is difficult to quarrel unduly with the Sinn Fein response to the open letter, and their analysis of the reactionary nature of Orange unionism. The unionist community, including that section of the working class that supports that position, are unlikely to abandon that position, unless convinced by concrete evidence that Britain is abandoning them.

In the absence of this evidence, appeals to the class interest of unionist workers to unite with their nationalist brethren in struggle for a socialist Ireland, unitary or federalist, will be rebuffed as a republican snare.

From their standpoint, historically, this reaction is not surprising. The very nature of the unionist statelet accorded to them the role of a privileged caste within the working class, akin to the position of white workers in South Africa.

Discrimination has been rampant in most sectors of industry that were prosperous, since the state was established — and before.

The walk-out in Short's during the Twelfth week sought the "right" of unionist workers to intimidate their nationalist colleagues and the less strident unionist brethren. It was only the pressure on the management from the United States to implement the MacBride Principles or lose lucrative contracts that forced the management to stand up to the bully-boys this year.

It also induced the British government and the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU to issue policy statements embodying the MacBride Principles. The old adage was borne out: "When you catch them by the cobbles, their hearts and minds will follow."

Tactically, it is unlikely that the Provos, without any signal from Britain, that they were interested

in moving away from the physical force phase of the campaign, would cease their campaign. Britain's negative response to Barry's mild demands for three judges in Diplock courts and joint RUC-UDR patrols shows no promise. Britain is not even prepared to accommodate its partners in the Anglo-Irish Agreement!

The withdrawal of the army to barracks and the standing down of the UDR and a declaration of intent to seek a negotiated settlement, might induce the Provos to agree a breathing space to allow negotiations to operate.

I believe that the Provo campaign and the Anglo-Irish Agreement that was secured on its back, although hotly denied by all sides, creates difficulties for the non-nationalist left in the North in facing up to the contradictions of sections of the working class supporting a colonialist relationship with Britain, which divides and represses another section of that class.

The cyclical violence, institutional and non-institutional, over tens of decades, derives from this colonial relationship. The emergence of Labour governments with a timid, conservative approach to this relic of British imperialism, instead of developing an anti-colonialist strategy, as would befit a party claiming to be socialist, sought the views of successive generations of northern trade union leaders, quite a number of whom were unionist by conviction.

Others were unionist by inclination, invoking historical determination for their inertia in seeking a genuine socialist, anti-imperialist solution of the problem.

Polarizing the community

The Northern Ireland situation is a complex political, economic and social reality. The salient facts are, however, easy to grasp. The civil rights movement, which was a movement for political equality for the oppressed Catholic and nationalist community in the late sixties and early seventies, was crushed by loyalist and Protestant reaction. Then, the ability of the Catholic and nationalist community to defend itself against this reaction by virtue of its own efforts was emasculated by mass internment and the intervention of the British army on the streets, where they have remained for the past eighteen years as necessary to offset what would develop into a civil war situation.

The British army, the Ulster Defence Regiment and the protestant paramilitaries effectively oppress the catholic and nationalist community, which cannot in the present situation have anything like equality of employment opportunity.

The main antagonistic contradiction is that which is exemplified by the oppression of the minority community. The contradiction offsets the contradiction existing between the capitalist class and the working class, which all Marxists know is the general antagonistic contradiction of capitalist society.

The violent campaign of the IRA is the action of revolutionary and terrorist violence by a violently oppressed minority against their political, economic and military oppressors. Notwithstanding that the IRA are generally morally superior in principle to their oppressors, they have also been guilty of inexcusable actions, which could only be condemned.

As long as the Provos' campaign continues, it must be said the Northern Ireland community will unfortunately continue to be polarized into loyalist protestant versus nationalist catholic extremism.

The effective resolution of this contradiction could only be civil war, in military terms. It can otherwise only come about by an increasing unity of the working class along socialist lines and across sectarian boundaries. This can only be a long, hard struggle.

The continuation of the mass presence of the British army on the streets, of the UDR, and the Provos' military response to these realities, can only perpetuate the sectarian nature of the violence and offset the only real solution, which is the political unity of the working class for peace and democracy, which does not in any real sense exist in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion it must be said that despite the limitation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, it has been the first recognition by any British government since partition of the principle that Ireland should be united should a majority in the northern province be in favour of it in a referendum.

If this majority were to materialise suddenly, the Irish government would be nonplussed, as it would have to substitute a temporary Irish military presence for the current British one — a task for which it is not economically or militarily prepared, or capable of.

It is the general opinion of British conservative and socialist people alike that the political and military withdrawal of Britain from Ireland is entirely overdue. The manner and speed with which this can be accomplished is being dictated by the internal situation in Ulster and the open weakness of the southern Irish state.

Kevin Anthony Cheevers,
Dublin, September, 1987.

The debate continues

Comrades, in reply to your Open Letter to the Provisional IRA (and we would assume to anyone waging the armed struggle in Ireland), we in the Republican Socialist Movement would like to make a few points. Firstly, we will give a quotation from Lenin, the significance of which will become apparent:

"What we are discussing is the indisputable and

fundamental duty of all socialists — that of revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation, explaining its scope and depth, arousing the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary determination, helping it to go over to revolutionary action, and forming for that purpose, organizations suited to the revolutionary situation."

We therefore feel that your claim to be a revolutionary organization is negated totally by your failure to recognize the situation in the Six Counties for what it is, namely a revolutionary situation. You fail to recognize the progressive nature of the national struggle being waged at this time through your failure to correctly analyze the significance of the Border (and attendant British occupation) as a barrier to working class unity.

When this artificial statelet was formed, it was not just a "Protestant state for a Protestant people", it was a severing of the most industrialized part of Ireland from its much less industrially developed hinterland. In this process a 'Labour aristocracy' was developed and encouraged. The overwhelmingly Protestant workforce was privileged at the expense of Catholics and the idea of 'superiority' emphasized.

Today, the labour aristocracy (which is largely in control of Trade Unions) exists to maintain their 'privileged' status, even though due to economic crises actual privilege is being eroded away.

The British actively and carefully maintain the illusion of privilege through the level of public subsidy of industry in the 6 counties, which is very much higher than the level of industrial subsidy in Britain itself. Harland and Wolff in particular benefit from this to the detriment (and chagrin) of British shipbuilders by being kept 'afloat' by a government which claims not to subsidise unprofitable industries.

Effective division of the Irish working class is consciously being paid for through the nose by the British government. It should be obvious that the British presence is a major barrier to working class unity.

Why are the British willing to maintain such a huge expenditure in subsidies and maintaining its armed forces in the Six Counties? Obviously not for the love of loyalists. Surely the obvious answer is that they are afraid of a revolutionary situation affecting Ireland as a whole and weakening the Western defences of NATO.

Here we would agree with the CPI's analysis of the significance of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in a European context and that it was meant to be a disaster for the Irish liberation movement and consequently for the liberation of the working class.

However, in this section you make one amazing statement: "It is a peculiar Republican strategy that provokes ever more active collaboration by a sovereign Irish government with British imperialism." Having correctly analyzed the basis and essence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement why does the CPI shy away from the logical conclusion: the closer a revolutionary situation comes to revolution, the more the ruling bourgeoisie will band together to counteract it.

Internationalism among the bourgeoisie has long been a part of counter-revolution. (The Free State government has a long history of collaboration both with Stormont and British governments). No-one desires oppression, yet to shy away from revolution because of the oppression it would provoke is to admit defeat. It is to admit the restriction of revolutionary theory and the revolutionary struggle to a level acceptable to the liberal wing of

the bourgeoisie.

Could this be part of the reason for the CPI condemnation of armed struggle in Ireland while praising the struggle in South Africa and other places geographically far removed from Ireland? Armed struggle is a tactic, not a principle. It is used when it is necessary. As a potentially revolutionary movement comes under more and more repression from the armed state, the choice becomes the use of arms or conformity with the 'constitutionalism' of the bourgeois state.

It is well recognized that the armed struggle here could not continue without popular support. The level of electoral success achieved by Sinn Fein shows to what extent the national liberation struggle is supported. To condemn as 'sectarian' and 'adventurist' the struggle which is taking place around us shows either a total lack of revolutionary awareness or sheer wilful blindness to the facts. (Just in passing, aren't there such happenings as the 'necklacing' of collaborators in South Africa? And what was the fate of the Trotskyists in Vietnam, not to mention collaborators?)

The campaign for Irish National Liberation is not an obstacle to progress. James Connolly commented that war was not an ennobling phenomenon. He advocated the use of all means to ensure as swift an end as possible. The tactics of isolating the occupation forces by execution of collaborators who actively help to maintain oppression is a legitimate tactic of war. To describe it otherwise is again to use the criteria of the liberal bourgeoisie.

Let us now look at some of the 'symptoms' of a revolutionary situation. To begin with we recognize that history is the result of human activity, which is determined by the environment in which it finds itself.

The 'objective' conditions are those which are formed independent of the desire or will of the makers of history, i.e. 'the masses.' No matter how developed the 'objective' conditions become they amount to nothing without the 'subjective' i.e. conscious human activity. This essential interrelation was recognized by Lenin:

"Marxism differs from all other socialist theories in the remarkable way it combines scientific sobriety in the analysis of the objective state of affairs and the objective course of evolution with the most emphatic recognition of the importance of the revolutionary energy, revolutionary creative genius and revolutionary initiative of the masses — and also, of course, of individuals, groups, organizations, and parties that are able to discover and achieve contact with one or another class."

Lenin also pointed out:

"Revolutions are never born ready made, they do not spring out of Jupiter's head; they do not kindle at once... They are always preceded by a process of unrest, crises, movements, revolts, the beginnings of revolution..."

It is patently obvious that since the civil rights marches, a revolutionary situation has been developing. The oppressed no longer wish to live in the 'old way', the ruling classes are in crisis. So far, the revolutionary trend has developed around the basic contradiction of the border and the national

question. If it appears at the moment that the liberation struggle has reached a stalemate it does not mean that struggle should end.

Certainly there should not be any kind of contact with loyalist forces. Loyalism is a fascist reactionary ideology. It is very foolish, indeed dangerous to suggest that there could be some kind of rapport between basically progressive and totally reactionary forces.

By now the significance of the quote with which we began this reply should be obvious. The revolutionary situation is static at the moment, therefore the subjective factor assumes the utmost importance. A tightly knit, ideologically correct vanguard movement must now force the pace.

Conditions here in Ireland are, as Rodney Arismendi has written in 'Marxism Today', "...making

the maturing of the revolutionary situation increasingly dependent of the ability of the vanguard to lead the masses in struggle, on the flexibility of its tactics, on the militant and energetic character of its activities."

At the moment the CPI is clearly NOT revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation because it does not believe it to exist. Only a vanguard Leninist Party can show the correct analysis of a given situation to the working class, only such a party can ensure that Labour does not wait and that the national liberation struggle does not end without social revolution.

We in the Republican Socialist Movement are intent upon the construction of such a Party.

September, 1987

Return to basics

A Chara, regarding your Open Letter debate, a multiplicity of similarly-inspired organizations isn't bad: damage occurs when the very similarity of objectives brings antagonism. The editors of UNITY deserve the gratitude of all for devoting space to an aspect of politics that was taboo to the nationalist and unionist press alike.

Your correspondents quote many examples from abroad. Which is fair enough....The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the proof of the worth of a revolutionary dogma is applicability to a wide variety of situations and political climates.

Also the immediacy of its appeal to rebels and revolutionaries of varied environmental backgrounds.

As children all of us, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Moslem, Sikh, assimilate the reported experience of adults in our proximity until such time as our own experiences are vivid enough to modify the sum total of data borrowed from our mentors.

Few escape wholly from this early influence and it is probably undesirable, psychologically speaking, that we should ever succeed in doing so completely. We who have grown up in the Irish republic-an tradition feel occasional embarrassment while interpreting our politics to foreigners. How to explain to our friends abroad that the glory of 1916, the drama of '69, the humiliation of the '81 hunger-strike deaths has fizzled out into a tit-for-tat inter-religious war?

How to tell the world that the imaginative Irish, the unpredictable Celts have allowed their war to become wholly foreseeable controllable, boring, to so unoriginal a breed as the British officer class?

I tend to write often in Irish because I feel that certain words like 'freedom', 'progress', 'enterprise', have to be fought for in the imperialist languages, they must be recaptured and repossessed for the benefit of the poor.

People everywhere need to be constantly reminded in every language that a 'free' society is one that seeks tirelessly to redress the balance in favour of the disadvantaged. Because their efforts to survive are the essential dynamic that produces all wealth.

From the consideration of this phenomenon did such persons as Marx, Lenin, Connolly, derive their socialist inspiration and base their socialist morality. A morality of realism.... a guide in evolving socialist strategies in the circumstances of their time and place. Like them we must return to basics in order to understand our own situation.

Eoin O'Murchu has given a pointer: Whatever unites our enemy weakens us, whatever divides our enemy strengthens us. Which is a strategy for a People's War for Freedom, a war that enlarges people's power by a series of victorious steps of an immediate and local nature.

Such specific and measurable steps were part of the IRA's successes in the 1920s (and after), an inevitable outcome of the war situation. Because practical and realistic guerrillas saw nothing blasphemous in linking the holy cause of Ireland with incidental benefits to Western peasants and Dublin proletarians. It may be difficult for some of us to see parallels in the present situation, yet certain developments of our present troubles

could be listed as tangible or intangible benefits to the people as a whole. Like territory abandoned by the retreating bourgeoisie....we must be watchful that they are not re-occupied. But I speak only of what is beneficial to the whole community.

Meanwhile it is by no means irrelevant to our present debate to remind ourselves that Protestant Ulster in a former day discovered for an Ireland "hopelessly entangled with the British state's presence" an escape route that was both realistic and revolutionary. Nor is it sentimental to suggest that the wheel has now turned its 200-year cycle bringing back dilemmas as critical as those faced by the first Irish Republicans.

What makes it difficult for many of us to see this is that we are still preoccupied with 19th. century nationalism. To Marx, Lenin and Connolly, nationalism was part of the upward movement of the oppressed.

But they were never blind to the imperialism of 'small' nations, like Belgium or Denmark. And who can deny that 26-County Ireland is rabidly imperialist?

The cause is not Irish unity, so much as Irish FREEDOM — and that's beyond the reach of any act of Parliament.

A. Craig,
Belfast, October, 1987.

Time for the left to create an alternative

In relation to the Open Letter debate about an end to the Provisionals' military campaign, I would like to contribute some observations and proposals. It strikes me that your assessment of the situation and hence the appeal for an end to armed force is less than realistic. Political violence in the Six Counties is not something that can be turned on or off like water from a tap. The Six County entity is such a despair-laden morass that violence is almost endemic under the circumstances.

The Provisionals are not so much a well-drilled firm where the board of directors marshal the work force as a social phenomenon: a fact, paradoxically, better understood by the British Government than by us, as is evidenced by the devious Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Internment, Castelreagh, Diplock injustice, hunger strike deaths, etc, ensure that so long as no viable alternative method is available, there will always be people who resort to physical force.

The Provisional leadership could no doubt order a ceasefire tomorrow, and what would happen? Some other grouping, under a different collection of initials, would simply fill the vacuum.

If the Irish Times of 18 September, (Sean Flynn report) is anything to go by, there is a virtual panoply of candidates ready to fill the space, and despite their rhetoric, each one seemingly intent on imitating the Provisionals' belief that gunpowder is for making propaganda with.

Nor does the essence of your argument gain sup-

port by simply calling for a ceasefire on the grounds that the Provisional campaign is "degenerating into sectarianism." Objectively speaking unionists may see it this way. It would, however, be closer to the mark to say that through failing to build up mass popular nationwide support, the Provisionals have allowed their campaign to degenerate into a vehicle for making publicity.

I imagine it's hardly necessary to tell the CPI that a vehicle for making publicity is just another way of saying "propaganda by the deed" and we all know what that is. Harsh facts don't go away by ignoring them.

The proposal I would make is therefore this: that it is incumbent on you — the people of scientific socialism — to take the initiative in organizing the "other way."

Calls and appeals are fine and praiseworthy, but remain just that — fine sentiment — until a concrete alternative is created. Unless and until such an alternative is in existence, your call will go unheeded.

Some of my friends have called recently for the re-founding of the Republican Congress. In other words, a call for a popular front. The name is less important than the concept, and somewhere, somewhere must begin to organize it.

Without trying to prejudice events, it's possible that you feel that your party is relatively small; that you would require help from some of the bigger battalions. True, but then that can quickly become an excuse for inaction — a sort of surrender to spontaneity.

What is most necessary is that, no matter how modest at first, the basic skeleton for a popular front must be constructed. Otherwise, those who long for such a development will remain frustrated, not only by events outside their direct control, but also by the lack of initiative from the Left.

In making this proposal, I would ask you to pay greater attention to the underlying class composition of the forces to be drawn into the alliance than to mere party superficialities.

The dynamic of history is more powerful than the words of individual political leaders. Be cautious therefore when you lay proposals before republicans. The Irish Left has burned its fingers in the past by misinterpreting developments within

the republican movement. By correctly measuring class forces and by gauging the objective requirement for machinery for co-ordinating the energies of workers and small farmers, Ireland-wide, I have a firm conviction that our sought-for "other way" will be found.

But for heaven's sake, comrades, take the lead in providing us with that alternative, and don't just sit on your hands waiting. 'Manana' isn't the battle-cry of any communist party — is it ?

James Tierney,
'League of Communist
Republicans, H-Block 2,
Long Kesh, October, 1987.

Lessons of the past

In their reply to the CPI's Open Letter, members of Sinn Fein claim that "only when the source of Loyalism, the discriminatory and oppressive Six County state is done away with, will Catholic and Protestant workers be able to come together in a united working class." But what is Connolly's legacy if not the dialectical unity of the national and social struggles ? Any other formulation is mechanical and arbitrary. In this case, who is making use of "abstract formulas and rules" ?

What was the lesson of the struggles of the 1920s and 1930s but that the anti-imperialist movement not tied into and led by a united working class was a lost and isolated movement ? In this case, who's "rooted in dogmatism" ?

As Peadar O'Donnell, a veteran of these struggles, pointed out, "it is only as a spearpoint of a mass movement that physical force has any meaning.

"Force is used only as a means of crossing the doorstep of state power. But it cannot reach the doorstep without the push of a united working class."

We must be wary of making simplistic parallels with anti-imperialist struggles in Algeria, Cuba or

South Africa. We can best learn from these struggles by understanding that strategy and tactics must be adopted to specific national conditions. And in contemporary Ireland the fact is that, as the Open Letter points out, the IRA struggle, "does not advance the necessary unity of class forces which is basic to the achievement of Ireland's unity and independence from all forms of imperial domination."

Yes, but what do we offer in practice ? Are we indeed "light and airy" in our alternatives to armed struggle ? The task of the moment is to make our work concrete, to search for and find those specific forms at all levels that will promote a broad working class unity built in struggle, built from the grass roots up, and will hopefully lead to a new and higher level of activity.

Let's broaden our discussion to include the actual practice of building unity in the anti-imperialist struggle. Let's learn from our failures and let's expand on our successes.

Patrick Delaney,
Berlin, October, 1987.

We must talk to unionists

The Sinn Fein reply to your address to the Provisionals made the point that "before loyalist workers can ever discover their real class interests, that (the British) military machine must be destroyed." Does this signify that Gerry Adams's assessment of the IRA's incapacity to gain a military victory (An Phoblacht, 10 January, 1985) was incorrect and has now been discarded?

Mao Zedong once made the point, recorded by Andre Malraux in his Antimemoirs that "we will never allow the gun to rule the party." In short, in revolutionary theory the gun is merely an instrument in the service of a political cause and in the hands of politically conscious people.

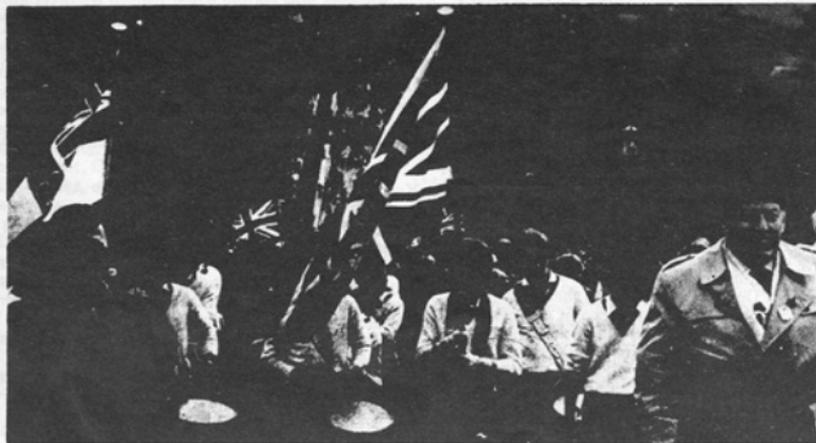
While accepting the Sinn Fein point that it would be wrong to "delay the struggle", I fear that their argument indicates a return to their old belief in a merely militant ideology of struggle, obviating the need to develop other, political strategies as

part of the liberation process.

Furthermore, to declare that the unity of Protestant and Catholic can only come about after the Six-County state "is done away with" is surely to misconstrue Tone's dictum that the unity of the whole people precedes, as a necessary prior condition, the attainment of their objective. And a practical consequence of this is the recognition by republicans that certain practical preliminary contacts must be made with the organized force of unionism.

Writing in Irish Freedom (November, 1913), Patrick Pearse declared to the Ulster Volunteers of his day: "You are erecting a Provisional Government of Ulster — make it a Provisional Government of Ireland and we will recognize it and obey it."

Robert Hall,
Dublin 4, October, 1987.



Fundamental flaws

The criticisms of the Republican campaign of violence contained in the Communist Party's Open Letter are undoubtedly correct, but, directed as they are against the tactic of armed struggle, they ignore the fundamental flaws in the Republican strategy.

The Sinn Fein members who replied to the Open Letter believe that "the class forces necessary for the creation of Irish unity exist now among the non-loyalist workers and farmers throughout Ireland. The aspirations for unity among these nationalists remains alive despite a twenty-year-long ruling class campaign to extinguish it."

It is true that the "aspiration" for Irish unity continues to be held by all but the most denationalized sectors of southern society; but aspirations have never made revolutions. Revolutionary changes occur only when an irreconcilable conflict exists between the interests of the ruling class and of the mass of the people. The people of the 26 Counties who constitute the large majority of the Irish people, have no experience of living under a sectarian ascendancy or of enduring daily harassment from foreign troops on their streets. The question of British rule in the North is not therefore an issue that can mobilize more than a small minority into political activity. This does not mean that there is no contradiction between imperialist control of our country and the interests of the southern population, but rather that in a neocolonial state this contradiction manifests itself primarily in economic rather than political terms.

The growing Puerto-Ricanization of the 26-County economy — dominated as it is by the assembly units of multinational corporations lured there by low wages and tax reliefs — represents a conflict between the vital interests of the bulk of our people on the one hand and the political establishment and imperialism on the other.

Multinational capitalism is failing as spectacularly in the eighties as national capitalism failed in the fifties: emigration figures will shortly equal those of a generation ago; the numbers employed in manufacturing industry are falling continuously;

the multinationals freely export their profits via the 'black hole'; and the public sector and social services are being decimated in order to service a massive national debt.

These are issues that directly affect the people of the 26 Counties and which will dominate the political agenda there for the foreseeable future. They are problems, moreover, that result from the state's subservience to imperialism, and which cannot be solved without fundamental political change.

The Leinster House parties, from the PDs to the WP, have no answer to this crisis other than to rattle the 'regional fund' begging bowl in Brussels, even as the continuing process of western European integration, which will shortly give free access for foreign financial institutions to the Irish market and terminate current tax incentives for multinational investors, is poised to deliver further shattering blows to the 26 County economy in coming years.

The priority of republicans should be to inject an anti-imperialist perspective into the economic question by campaigning for the plugging of the black hole, for rescheduling of the national debt, for import controls and for withdrawal from the EEC. These demands for the re-assertion of economic sovereignty have a potential to mobilize and radicalize people in the 26 Counties that a campaign against partition entirely lacks.

Neither is it possible to combine the two approaches successfully: an armed campaign must inevitably overshadow mundane political agitation and command the near-exclusive attention of the movement waging it. A ceasefire in the Six Counties is therefore a prerequisite if a successful campaign is to mounted against the neocolonial status of the 26 County state.

This is not to say that northern republicans should lapse into inactivity. The priority in the North — after an amnesty campaign — should be to attack the sectarian ascendancy that constitutes the material basis of loyalism.

Vigorous campaigns against discrimination along the lines of the MacBride Principles, coupled with

resistance to local displays of triumphalism, could begin to weaken the ascendancy and to chip away at the foundation on which British rule rests. The republican movement must decide if it is to remain an organization based on the nationalist working class ghettos in the Six Counties, where state repression will assure it of continuing support for the armed campaign but leave it isolated

from the mass of the people, or whether it intends to build a nationwide movement capable of challenging imperialism both north and south.

The continuation of the armed campaign is not compatible with the second option.

Vincent Morley,
Dublin, November, 1987.

Reality of Shorts' struggle distorted

Matt Merrigan's letter to UNITY and the Irish Socialist (as part of the Open Letter debate) is astonishing in its analysis of the alternatives for progressive struggle in Northern Ireland — particularly as he is a retired trade union official who spent many years of action in the Irish trade union movement. No-one doubts the very difficult and seemingly contradictory pressures that trade unions in Northern Ireland face: but to suggest that they have done nothing more, and can do nothing more than reflect the sectarian emotions of many of their members is a gross distortion that will not stand up to objective examination of trade union history.

The most recent experience of the trade union movement in dealing with sectarianism in Northern Ireland is referred to by Matt Merrigan to justify his analysis. In order to make it justify his conclusions, he is forced into relating that experience in such a way as to turn the facts upside down.

The problem was reported in UNITY at the time. Let us examine the details once again. On 1 July, 1987, a small section of the Short's workforce went on strike when the management removed a number of flags that were displayed that day. By Friday 3 July, as a result of a number of incidents of this nature, some 1500 of the 7,000 Short's employees were not attending work. It should be understood that a large proportion of the 1500 were locked out by the management. The management had adopted the ploy of closing a department where flags or bunting were displayed.

The trade union movement was urging all its members to attend work and not to become involved in

a dispute over flags or any other issue that was not in their material interests.

The unions were critical of the management. By closing departments, the management was swelling the numbers outside the gate. They were offending many workers who were not in support of those on strike, and potentially creating a significant industrial and political problem.

On Saturday 4 July the shop stewards and trade union officials met and resolved to make a maximum effort to intervene and resolve the dispute. On Sunday 5 July, meetings took place between the unions and the management. The unions reiterated their public support for the removal of the flags. They also demanded that the management permit all those workers who were willing to work to enter the factory premises. The management eventually conceded this demand, under strong union pressure.

On Monday 6 July, the trade union movement was engaged in a major confrontation with the sectarian elements who were organizing the stoppage. The unions argued publicly and courageously that all their members should go to work; that they should reject those sectarian elements who were organizing the stoppage; that the factory premises should be a politically neutral environment, free from sectarian emblems of any description.

The Short's workforce responded to that lead. On Thursday 9 July the relatively small hardcore of 'strikers' were the last to return to work. All employees were now at work, in an environment free from any trappings of sectarianism.

The trade union movement in Northern Ireland has a proud history of courageous leadership. It is perhaps understandable that some who have no experience of it conclude, incorrectly, that the only alternative is anti-state violence. One would expect Matt Merrigan to praise rather than denigrate the trade union leadership in this particular dispute.

It was a significant victory for the trade union movement. It is probably the most significant victory of the ICTU's anti-sectarian, anti-intimidation campaign.

Broad mass movement political action is not easily achieved or understood, especially in the unique circumstances history has provided for the Left in Northern Ireland.

The Outdoor Relief disputes, the struggle for the survival of Short's, the great wage battles, the civil rights movement, the fair employment problems, as well as many other human rights and repressive legislation issues, all show by concrete experience that it can be achieved, and indeed that there is no alternative to mass-movement work.

In the context of the overall debate, if we were to accept the implications of Matt Merrigan's analysis then we would abandon all our efforts to win workers in Northern Ireland from sectarian positions.

We would abandon this political territory to the sectarian politicians, and thereby provide them, unchallenged, with an army of workers to support their particular sectarian objectives, which of course are anti-working class and anti-national independence.

The present armed campaign assists them in exactly this way. Those who promote and engage in it have of course abandoned those thousands of workers to irreversible reaction, and seem determined to maintain them as an enemy — as if they hadn't got enough.

Short's Worker,
Belfast, November, 1987.



M. Merrigan on 'shorts worker' contribution

Dear Comrade, your correspondent, 'Short's Worker' drags up again the Outdoor Relief Strike to seek to demonstrate that deep down in the psyche of Unionist workers is a socialist genie trying to get out.

Unionists see socialism as the Trojan horse of Republicanism and Irish unity, and that is a correct perception.

Unionism and class solidarity leading to a united socialist Ireland are incompatible. Britain sustains the illusions of Unionist workers that the Union is sound and their 'exalted' status is also thereby ass-

ured.

Any countervailing view on the Union is seen by Unionist workers as threatening their hegemony in the workplace. Discrimination is a by-product of this aberration.

Some trade union leaders in the past also looked at the world of Unionism in the same way and were part of the problem, not part of the solution.

MacBride stalks the industrial landscape. People are learning the hard way.

Matt Merrigan,
November, 1987.

Winning workers to socialism

"Deep down in the psyche of Unionist workers is a socialist genie trying to get out"!

That is the way Matt Merrigan caricatures the views of those who believe in fighting for working class unity — a unity including those workers who currently hold Unionist beliefs. That caricature is superficial and deliberately misleading.

The point is not that Unionist workers are 'really' socialists but that they are REALLY workers. They are members of the working class, exploited by the capitalist class, whatever real and imaginary privileges they may have over other workers.

Who other than the working class can bring about socialism? Since when did we define the working class by their current political opinion? Are the hundreds of thousands of workers who voted Fianna Fail, Fine Gael or Tory in Ireland and Britain no longer members of the working class?

Yes, socialism and Unionism are incompatible — as Connolly in his debates with Walker showed. But socialism and bourgeois nationalism are also incompatible as Connolly by his words and actions also demonstrated.

Matt Merrigan is a long-time trade union leader and socialist. Has he now given up hope of win-

ning workers to socialism, of fighting to detach them from reactionary political ideas?

Certainly the demand for civil rights and an end to discrimination are part of the way to fight against Unionism. And Matt Merrigan knows very well that many Northern Trade Unionists, and particularly Communists, have been in the forefront of the civil rights struggle for three decades.

Contrast their long hard struggle to win Protestant workers from Unionism with the attitude of the Provisionals, whose military campaign Matt Merrigan supported in his first letter, (September, 1987).

They are engaged in bombing and shooting Protestant workers. As a socialist, faced with the unfortunate fact that many thousands of workers, North and South, are not convinced of the need for a united Socialist Republic, does Matt Merrigan think it is better to win them or write them off all together, literally?

Lance Noakes,
ex-Short's Worker,
Belfast, December, 1987.

who eagerly welcomed de Valera's return, Labour must wait.

It is time for Labour to be recruited in the anti-imperialist struggle. For republicans this means turning one's back on all ways of analyzing, thinking and struggling that belong to the nineteenth century. I realize, of course, that this is a tall order; but, of course, it has been done before: at the Republican Congress, to mention but one example.

How are some people reacting? Why have Nationalist, Sinn Féin and the ANC (to name three) over the control of the political process? Over their armed forces? Over the political process? Over the political process? Over the political process?

How are some people reacting? Why have Nationalist, Sinn Féin and the ANC (to name three) over the control of the political process? Over their armed forces? Over the political process? Over the political process?

Practical steps necessary

A Chara, Throughout the current ceasefire debate Vincent Morley's letter has been one of the most useful. It not only highlights tactical weaknesses in the republican campaign, but also draws attention to its very real strategic deficiencies.

Concentration on anti-partitionism gives rise to the difficulty of interesting any substantial number of people in the 26 Counties. Even in the 6 Counties this same factor also tends to ghettoise Sinn Féin support. Consequently those economic issues which could genuinely rally a majority of the Irish people, (North as well as South, don't forget) are left relatively unattended. It would be difficult to argue with Vincent's assessment on any of this. Yet something remains unsaid, something of a non sequiter which tends to run throughout much of the debate.

This is the unspoken assumption that a post-ceasefire Sinn Féin could or would take a leading role in the anti-imperialist struggle; thus leading its supporters onto a new and more productive path.

The essence of Sinn Féin support gathering remains devoted to constructing pan-nationalism. Don't be so beguiled by the progressive 40 per cent who vote pro-abortion at Ard Fheiseanna as to overlook the 60 per cent (leadership included) who vote against it.

There are some contradictions between cross-class pan-nationalism and anti-imperialism, and a violent anti-partition campaign helps to mask this dilemma.

Therefore the Republican Movement would face grave problems if it attempted to switch emphasis from anti-partitionism. Especially so if there were no campaign to force.

The very nature of the movement ensures that a large section of this '60 per cent' would split from the party and drift towards a more traditional rep-

ublicanism. What remained could quite conceivably develop along fairly orthodox socialist or even Marxist lines.

Yet every thread indication points to the fact that this group would follow an electoral/reformist path. In other words a nascent Workers' Party mark two.

At that stage the wheel would have turned full circle. The radical Left in Ireland would remain firm but marginal and the reformist Left would have expanded a little.

More significant perhaps, the 'grey coats' would retire once more to fulminate about betrayal. A betrayal which will of course be diagnosed as stemming from involvement in that dreaded field, 'Politics.'

For ten or twenty more years, anyone who talks to them of elections, social agitation or economic policy will be quietly but firmly told, "Ireland's freedom comes from a gun barrel son."

To claim that a ceasefire is a pre-requisite to progress is to overlook these complexities. A laying down of arms would open different perspectives no doubt, but only if the ceasefire was unanimously observed. Angry men have a great propensity for finding rifles after all.

The current debate is useful, that much is clear. Yet if it's to be more than just an exercise in speaking polite, politically correct, but ineffective words, there should be a search for solutions. And practical solutions at that.

In this light, the CPI might therefore consider a second debate (or an extension of the present one) directed specifically at this point. A debate centering on the practical steps necessary to break the above mentioned impasse.

T. McKearney,
Long Kesh, January, 1988

Wrong tactics damage the Irish peoples just struggle.

It cuts me to the quick to see the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland at present treated as a 'quantite negligible' on the continent, that can be left to the 'security forces' north and south of the border. The thirteen dead of Derry's Bloody Sunday are long forgotten, Bobby Sands and his companions are no longer thought of, and the Thatcher-Haughhey version of Irish events holds sway in the vast majority of the media. But this seems to be no more than a dimmed reflection of the public attitude in Ireland, north and south.

Something has gone very wrong with republicanism: it used to enjoy a lot of sympathy on the continent. All this has made me return to republicanism's founding father. For me, the most impressive thing about Wolfe Tone — still looming, an impressive figure, through the ages — is the unhesitating way in which he linked the fortunes of the Irish nation with those of the French republic, then the most progressive force in the world.

Irish republicanism was not alone in this; and "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", became the watchword of pre-socialist internationalism. And none more fit than Wolfe Tone to remind us that the cause of liberty relied first of all on "that numerous and respectable class of community, the men of no property."

In the wake of '67 none were more fervent and active outside Ireland in the cause of Irish independence and the release of the prisoners than Marx and Engels and the International Working Men's Association. Scrutinise the echo of the Easter Rising in the war-torn world and the extensive passages in Lenin's writings stand out at once. The leader of the October Revolution not only defended the men and women of the rising against the charge of having participated in a "national putsch" he also expounded the right of all oppressed nations to use the crisis of imperialism during the war to gain their independence by all means.

Finally, echoes of Wolfe Tone, republicans and communists join in the Connolly Column to defend the Spanish republic, then the most progressive country in the capitalist world.

All these crossing points of republicanism and internationalism, of republicanism and the forces of social revolution, recalled here in telegram style, have led me to wonder why present day republicans fight shy of the internationalist dimension and of the social content of anti-imperialist struggle; why then cling to the essentially nineteenth century idea of Griffith's Sinn Fein: nationhood first, social questions later.

In this they incongruously lag behind anti-imperialist movements in the third world. There is to my mind, an important experience worth recalling the ability of republicanism up to the treaty of 1921 to combine all forms of struggle — political and military, legal and underground — against British imperialism. In other words it advanced (more in practice than in theory) from the nineteenth-century 'physical force only' secret society.

(I am well aware that the liaison between the Dail and the IRA in the countryside was for a long time very loose).

The civil war brought a terrible throwback. The triumph of the gombeen-men was the worst of all: it was a counter-revolution. But to read de Valera on his relations with the IRA is to realize forcibly that the army had taken over again. We are back to where we came in. And we are faced with a redoubtable dialectical contradiction: the most progressive force within Irish nationalism of that day is hampered decisively by a throwback in its theory and practice to the nineteenth century.

Why this excursion in Irish history? Because I imagine that Irish republicans, with their knowledge of and attachment to the history of their country, might be interested in a new and fresh view of the crossing-points mentioned above when they are looking for a way out of the bloodstained impasse signposted 'Enniskillen.'

The time for taking this fresh look is propitious. The social composition of the republican movement of 1987 is vastly different from that of the 1920s. Gone are the shopkeepers, the businessmen, the prosperous farmers; gone are all those

who eagerly welcomed de Valera's ukase, Labour must wait.

It is time for : Labour to the vanguard in the anti-imperialist struggle. For republicans this means turning one's back on all ways of analysing , thinking and struggling that belong to the nineteenth century. I realize of course, that this is a tall order; but, of course, it has been done before: at the Republican Congress, to mention but one example.

Here are some pertinent queries: Why have Nicaragua's Sandinistas and the ANC of South Africa asserted the control of the political movement over their armed forces from the very beginning — following in this the example of other successful revolutions of our age, such as the Russian and Vietnamese revolutions ?

How did the ANC manage to draw considerable numbers of whites into the freedom struggle, who,

in the eyes of some republicans, are no more than 'members of the white garrison in South Africa'?

Can republicans afford to continue ignoring today's internationalist dimension, the tremendous help rendered by the socialist countries — above all the Soviet Union — by their foreign policy and by their very existence to the anti-imperialist and liberation movements all over the world.

In 'The Politics of Freedom' Gerry Adams writes at some length of the close links between republicanism and socialism. Who is going to be in the vanguard of the struggle for Irish self-determination and socialism in Northern Ireland except working class people, Catholic and Protestant ? Eleven of them were blown to death in Enniskillen.

Wolfgang Colden*
January, 1988.



* Wolfgang Colden is a West German communist and historian who also writes on Irish affairs for the communist newspaper, 'Unsere Zeit'. He is currently writing a major appraisal of Irish republicanism aimed at the German-speaking population.

James Stewart: General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland replies.

The discussion which has taken place in the columns of the Irish Socialist and UNITY as a result of the National Executive Committee's Open Letter to the Provisional IRA is a useful contribution in the battle of ideas and it has been conducted by all contributors in a responsible manner — free from declamatory statements, entrenched positions and overall attempting to face the question of how we can achieve an Ireland — free, united, independent and Socialist.

It is to be regretted that the Provisional IRA, the body to which the Open Letter was addressed by the CPI, did not reply as we would have liked to include their views in this pamphlet which we are convinced would have enriched the debate.

Therefore, on behalf of the Communist Party, I would like to ask the Provisional IRA to read this pamphlet and to reply in writing to our Open Letter and the discussion which has taken place — we will publish the reply in the Irish Socialist and UNITY in full and re-open this discussion which is so important to the creation of a working class led anti-imperialist movement in our island.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is not to answer the debate point by point or to present a final conclusion on behalf of the CPI — it is simply a contribution on a necessary on-going discussion.

The central question in our debate has been whether the "armed struggle" conducted by the Provisional IRA is an asset or a liability in the battle to free Ireland from the domination of imperialism. Posing this question does not in any way cast a slur on the sincerity, the commitment or the courage of those who are or have been engaged in "armed struggle" since 1970 — or belittle in any way those who have paid with their lives or who have been or are incar-

cerated in prison for armed political action. It simply is an attempt to reach an assessment of political policy, strategy and tactics based on the objective of an Ireland united, independent and Socialist against the political realities of the 20th century.

The CPI's position on the "armed struggle" of the Provisional IRA which developed out of the Unionist Pogrom of August 1969, was fed on by internment in 1971, and encouraged by British State repression ever since, has been that it is counterproductive: it doesn't weaken the enemy — British imperialism — but objectively helps it to increase its grip on Ireland as a whole, whilst increasing the confusion and divisions amongst the class forces who are objectively anti-imperialist.

The proof of this point is the Anglo-Irish Agreement which has been a major success for Thatcher's imperialist aims. Through the vehicle of the Hillsborough Treaty, the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental meetings and the Maryfield Secretariat, the British Government is achieving objectives which the British ruling class have held since the imposed partition of our island in 1921 — i.e. increasing its influence and control over the whole of Ireland.

We ignore this reality at our peril! Imperialism has strengthened its position in Ireland — a sovereign Irish Government in the Hillsborough Treaty has acknowledged Britain's "right" to partition Ireland in 1921 and has underwritten Britain's sovereignty over Northern Ireland.

In the process it has won practical collaboration with the national bourgeoisie — North and South — in a concentrated attack on the democratic and human rights of the Irish working people.

An integral element of British ruling class strategy in Ireland is to achieve an acquiescent and collabor-

ating Ireland, North and South, within the EEC — to act as a support and not as a challenge to their position within the West European Union envisaged by the Single European Act which comes into effect in 1992.

Contained within this strategy is an objective of world imperialism — led by the USA — of undermining the neutrality of the Republic of Ireland and drawing the whole of this island into the NATO military bloc.

As I have said, they have already had considerable successes through the achievement of the Anglo-Irish Accord and in the process have put the balance of forces in Ireland presently in their favour. They have achieved significant, although not complete collaboration, of the national bourgeoisie, North and South. And they have neutralized effective Unionist opposition to their plan — forcing Unionist leaders to begin the process of rethinking their positions and throwing Unionist supporters into confusion.

The heritage of partition is currently working in the interests of Britain's imperialist elite — the anti-imperialist forces in Ireland are weak, divided and confused — anti-imperialist consciousness amongst the working class is at a very low ebb.

In the North sectarianism is a major contributor to holding back the development of clear working class, anti-imperialist consciousness. In the South well over 60 years of divorcement from the North and the harsh economic cutbacks on public spending have concentrated the minds of the working people there on emigration, jobs and living standards — with the question of national unity being relegated to an emotional aspiration — without urgency.

These are the realities we must all face up to — all of us who want to see an Ireland united, independent and Socialist. These realities must determine our actions in the responsible task of building an effective anti-imperialist movement in Ireland which can win.

Which brings us to the question of the contribution the current "armed struggle" of the Provisional IRA makes in this context.

During the 1970s and even into the early '80s, the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein believed that the "armed struggle" could win. Today there are few amongst them who believe so. There is a realization that British imperialism cannot be defeated militarily in current conditions and more emphasis has been placed on political opposition.

However, the "armed struggle" acts as a liability for Sinn Fein in its political work — undermining their efforts to conduct political struggle. For example, the effects of the Enniskillen bombings in November, 1987, weakened Sinn Fein's position amongst the Nationalist population, North and

South, and undermined the republican cause internationally, in Britain, in Western Europe, in the USA and in the Socialist countries.

This year Thatcher's Government demonstrated its arrogance to the world in the denial of the Birmingham Six Appeal, the refusal to publish the Stalker /Sampson Report, the release of Private Thain from prison, and the executions of the Gibraltar Three by the SAS.

But subsequent killings carried out by the Provisional IRA threw a life-belt to Margaret Thatcher and enabled the British media to conduct a propaganda campaign not only against the PIRA and Sinn Fein, but against the aspirations of Irish unity and independence.

Armed struggle against imperialism is of course part of the general political battle. But, to be effective it must always be used politically and under political control. Each armed action must be judged by its political contribution to the overall struggle against imperialism, i.e. does it advance the cause, or does it help the enemy.

I have already given a few recent examples as to how the actions of the PIRA have played directly into the hands of Thatcher. But we all know there are many more stretching back to the re-arming of the RUC and making it easy for the British Government to bring in its so-called "Ulsterization" policy, with its catastrophic contribution to sectarianism.

In an effective armed struggle against imperialism — politics control the gun — not the other way round, which, events demonstrate, is the case with the Provisionals. That is why we are constantly being faced with so many set backs in the anti-imperialist struggle. Unfortunately it has also contributed to the increased influence of British imperialism over the whole of Ireland instead of weakening it.

Therefore, as fellow anti-imperialists, we Communists, are asking the Provisional IRA to re-think their strategy and tactics in the struggle — not to abandon it. If, as we firmly assert, bombs and bullets help the enemy, then that method of struggle should be put to one side and a ceasefire called — otherwise the sacrifice in lives and lost liberties will continue in vain whilst imperialism tightens its grip.

Despite imperialism's successes to date, the contradictions in its position remain and there are concrete conditions for beginning the process of building an effective all-Ireland anti-imperialist movement around the issue of national unity and self determination, democratic rights, social and economic conditions and neutrality.

The leadership and members of the Provisional IRA can make an effective contribution to this process — without the gun!

James Stewart,
June, 1988.

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