

A Socialist Workers Party pamphlet



Why we say

**TROOPS OUT  
OF IRELAND!**

A Socialist Workers Party pamphlet



Why we say  
**TROOPS OUT  
OF IRELAND!**

First published September 1980.  
Produced and distributed for the  
SWP by Socialists Unlimited,  
265 Seven Sisters Road, London  
N4 2DE.  
ISBN 0 905998 13 8  
Printed by East End Offset Ltd  
(TU), London E2.

This pamphlet was written by  
members of the South Manchester  
and North London districts of the  
Socialist Workers Party.

## INTRODUCTION

British troops were sent to 'keep the peace' in Northern Ireland in August 1969. Eleven years and almost 2000 deaths later, the army remains on the streets. The violence that followed their arrival has been far greater than what went before.

We live in the shadow of that war. It affects us in many different ways. We in the Socialist Workers Party—and many other socialists too—believe that the only way to end the war for the benefit of the workers of Ireland and Britain is to get the troops out of Northern Ireland, and to get them out *now*.

In these short pages we answer the arguments of those who oppose this view: Won't there be a bloodbath? Surely the troops are keeping the peace over there? We will also look at some of the things that workers in this country can do to bring this war to an end.

## Weren't the troops sent in to keep the peace and stop the violence?

BRITISH TROOPS appeared on the streets of Ireland in August 1969. There is a widespread belief that they went there to prevent violence between Catholic and Protestant sections of the community and that they have stayed there to defeat the armed resistance they met from the IRA. The truth is very different.

The movement which was to climax in the arrival of British troops was not a 'republican' movement: it did not ask for the end of the state of Northern Ireland or the border. Its demands were moderate: an end to discrimination against Catholics in jobs, housing and the voting system. And it did not use guns or bombs—but peaceful marches.

To all but a few, the demands of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement will seem entirely justified. For in the North Catholics were—and still are—heavily discriminated against. To understand why and how, we must take a brief look at the history of Ireland.

Ireland was one of Britain's earliest colonies, and the same process that saw the Red Indians of North America subjugated by English settlers and the blacks of Southern Africa massacred and enslaved, saw Ireland invaded by British troops 300 years ago and conquered by sabre and musket. By 1700 the Irish owned only 15 per cent of the land of their own country, though they were 75 per cent of the population. The remainder was owned or tenanted by the relatively small number of Protestant settlers, or held by absentee landlords who lived in Britain.

To safeguard her rule, Britain installed thousands of Protestant settlers, particularly in the north. In return for identifying with British interests against the native Irish, they received privileges, in jobs, in

From the start, it was not religion itself that mattered, but that the division between Protestants and Catholics enabled British landlords to rule and reap the wealth of Ireland. Religious differences were the smokescreen. The smoke still gets in the eyes of all too many people today.

Indeed at first, while the settlers enjoyed many rights and privileges denied to the native Catholics, they also suffered considerable disabilities and frequently came into conflict with the British aristocracy who held real power in Ireland. It was a section of the Protestant middle class in the north of Ireland who formed the United Irishmen and led the first major rebellion in an attempt to make Ireland an independent republic. The rebellion was defeated.

But the growth of industry widened the gap. Industry developed in the Protestant dominated north, while the south remained largely agricultural and economically backward. The new industrial prosperity went mainly to Protestants, and moreover it was closely integrated with industry in Britain. Protestant middle-class Republicanism quickly evaporated, to be replaced by a determination to maintain the link with Britain, the basis of their industrial success and prosperity.

This uneven development did not mean two nations were emerging in Ireland, as some have claimed. It was the result of one dominant factor: British rule. And northern Protestants have never claimed to be a separate nation.

But it was a case of jobs, and the best jobs, for Protestants with none or the very worst for Catholics. Much of this favouritism was organised through the Orange Order, an all-Protestant secret society that is still powerful today.

Such discrimination kept the working class divided and encouraged the Protestant workers to identify with their bosses in opposing Irish independence, which was still the aim of the Catholic majority. Protestant workers also feared that an independent Ireland would result in a lowering of their living standards, and in a loss of political and civil liberties under a reactionary Catholic regime. These fears were not entirely wild fancies.

So long as the leadership of the nationalist movement was in the hands of the Catholic middle class, who looked no further than to the development of a capitalist system of their own, then the bonds which united Protestant workers to the local Unionist bosses, and through them to the British empire, would remain intact.

In 1921, after a hard-fought war for an Irish Republic, Britain decided to partition Ireland, giving limited independence to 26 counties

in the south, while retaining the union with six northern counties. It was a compromise which enabled Britain's rulers to buy off large sections of the Catholic middle class, satisfy the demands of the Unionist middle class, and yet still retain their own economic domination over both North and South. That the majority of the people of Ireland taken as a whole wanted independence was ignored.

When the Northern Ireland state was formed in 1921, the local government electoral boundaries were drawn so carefully that even where Catholics were in a majority, they were denied power.

In Derry, for example, a city with a substantial Catholic majority, there were five electoral wards. The Catholic majority, crammed into two of them, returned eight councillors. The Protestant minority, spread among the remaining three wards, returned twelve councillors and retained power in the city.

The government in the North carried on the established tradition of divide-and-rule against the working class. Real material privileges in jobs, housing and elementary rights, ensured continuing Protestant working-class loyalty and gave them a defensive attitude which found its expression in the slogan 'No Surrender'. This slogan refers just as much to the material advantages loyalist workers enjoy over Catholics as it does to their hostility to Irish unity or to Catholicism as a religion.

The Stormont government in Northern Ireland actively encouraged employers to give jobs to Protestants rather than Catholics. Areas with Catholic majorities were starved of industrial investment. The result was that Catholic areas suffered unemployment twice as high as Protestant areas. In the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, 90 per cent of the workforce is Protestant though a third of the city's population is Catholic. Sir Basil Brooke, prime minister of the North for 20 years, boasted: 'I am proud to say that I have never employed a Roman Catholic in any position on my estates.'

And there were direct measures to prevent Catholics protesting against this situation. The Ulster Volunteers, the exclusively Protestant paramilitary force that had been formed to keep Northern Ireland British when the South won independence, were officially recognised as an armed and Protestant special police force, the B-Specials.

In April 1963 President Vorster of South Africa said he 'would be willing to exchange all the legislation (of South Africa) . . . for one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act.'

Against this discrimination the Civil Rights Movement marched, peacefully. But however 'moderate' their demands, these threatened the privileges of the Protestants which were the very foundation of the government and state of Northern Ireland. The government replied with force.

When Catholics marched through the streets of Derry in October 1968, the police charged with batons and beat men, women and children



to the ground. A peaceful march from Belfast to Derry in January 1969 was set on by Orangemen and B-Specials, with the police looking on. The marchers were beaten and stoned. There were repeated confrontations in the months that followed, with police raids into Catholic areas breaking windows and beating people up. In April, one of their victims, Samuel Devenny, died as a result.

In August 1969 came the explosion . . . A three-day battle kept the police out of Derry's Bogside. Orangemen, police and B-Specials decided to take their revenge. They burst into the Catholic areas of Belfast, guns blazing. Eight Catholics were killed, hundreds more were driven from their homes.

So the troops were sent in.

When the soldiers of the British Army lined up across William Street in Belfast on 14 August 1969, the Catholic minority felt they had struck a blow for justice and equality. The British government promised to improve conditions for Catholics, disbanded the B-Specials and said it would disarm the rest of the police force too. Now the British government would give them civil rights. . .

## So why are they still fighting?

THE BRITISH government didn't send in the troops out of horror at the discrimination against Catholics. Far more fundamental was that Britain needed to maintain political stability in Ireland to protect its own economic interests, north and south. Any serious civil unrest could lead to a full-scale civil war which would involve the southern Irish government. Britain simply wanted to damp down the flames.

For although the British government spoke of 'reforms', it left the Protestant Unionist Party in control of the Northern Ireland government. The party that was founded on discrimination was to be expected to root it out. The Unionists were in effect being asked to cut their own throats.

It is hardly surprising that those Unionist politicians who reluctantly supported the reforms demanded by Britain—O'Neill, Chichester-Clark and, ultimately, Faulkner—were one by one forced from office by their own supporters. It wasn't that they failed as individuals (though they were hardly an inspiring trio), but that the state of Northern Ireland was unreformable as it was. Only by dismantling the whole building could the discrimination, its very foundations, be removed.

That this was so may not have been obvious to the British

government, but it was certainly obvious to the Catholic people of Northern Ireland, who had learned from bitter experience not to trust any promises from Unionist governments.

And the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), though shorn of the B-Specials, was also left intact—a force that for years had attacked peaceful marches with batons, water cannon and CS gas. The same police force was 'keeping order' that for years had acted to keep Catholics 'in their place'.

While such a government and such a police force existed, the majority of Catholics knew their only protection lay in defending themselves. They determined that any future attacks would not find them unprepared. The IRA, previously a small, isolated group, started to grow rapidly.

The growth of the IRA added a new political dimension to the situation, or more accurately it resurrected an old one. For the IRA had fought for a united Irish republic since before the partition of 1921. The open involvement of Republicans now raised the stakes from the pursuit of civil rights to the struggle for a re-united Ireland.

At first the British government and its troops wavered between trying to push through reforms and maintaining the Stormont government. It introduced a few reforms and tolerated the Catholic self-defence groups. The result was growing opposition from the Loyalist groups, including Loyalist workers, who had always seen themselves as defenders of British interests in the past and now felt betrayed. The British government had disbanded the B-Specials to keep the Catholics happy. Now it tried to calm down the Protestant rage by showing that the British Army was just as good as the B-Specials at dealing with Republicanism. It established a new military force, the Ulster Defence Regiment, which former B-Specials joined wholesale.

As a report by the National Council for Civil Liberties said, the Army 'intensified their searches for arms in the Roman Catholic areas, without undertaking similar operations in the Protestant areas.' In July 1970 they allowed Orange parades which celebrated the Protestant dominance.

The final straw was the imposition by the Army of a curfew in the Catholic Lower Falls areas. The troops went from house to house, ransacking rooms, tearing apart furniture and floorboards in a search for the arms with which the Catholics had been defending themselves. During this operation, four innocent civilians were shot and killed by the Army. As the NCCL reported: 'No proof has ever been offered that those killed were engaged in illegal activities of any kind. Their only "crime" was to come within the sights of a British soldier who shot to kill without any attempt to ascertain the identity of his target . . . No criminal proceeding or disciplinary action of any kind was taken against the soldiers involved.'

Up to this point, no British troops had been killed by Catholics or the IRA. Those who blame the IRA for the violence in Ireland should ask themselves what would be their own reaction if troops tore their houses apart, shot up their neighbours and flooded a tightly-packed working class area with tear gas.

The British troops were not 'restoring peace'. Ostensibly they had been sent in to allow reforms. But no Unionist government was going to bring in reforms that threatened the privileges of its own supporters. In such a situation the campaign for civil rights had to continue, and the British Army took up the defence of the established institutions. This, after all, has been the role of armies everywhere—and particularly in Ireland.

The British troops were not 'restoring peace'. They had shown that, faced with a choice between commitment to 'reform' and defending the institutions that guaranteed privilege, they sided with the latter.

Privilege, and discrimination against Catholics, was now defended by the guns of the British Army. The troops stand across the road to civil rights in Ireland.

## By calling for the withdrawal of the troops, aren't you just giving in to the IRA?

THE BRITISH press and politicians usually portray the Provisional IRA as murderers and gangsters with little or no popular support. But an internal British Army report, leaked just after the Tories took office, points out: 'The Provisional IRA (PIRA) is essentially a working-class organisation based in the ghetto areas of the cities and poorer rural areas . . . The movement (PIRA) will retain popular support sufficient to maintain secure bases in the Republican areas.'

The fact is that the growth of the Provisionals was essentially a defensive reaction to the presence of the British Army and the violence it uses. The IRA barely existed before the present 'troubles' began in 1969, and emerged from the remnants of the old republican movement to defend the Catholic areas against attacks by loyalists, the RUC, and then the Army.

When it became clear that the Northern Ireland state was not capable of being 'reformed', the Provisionals went onto the offensive. With the British government and the British Army now guaranteeing the institutions of police and state which maintained the privileges of Loyalists and the discrimination against Catholics, the only possible

way forward was to force the British into getting out of Ireland.

As socialists we give full support to all those who fight oppression and for the right of self-determination, wherever in the world they may be. This applies equally to the Provisionals, who are fighting a war against the oppression of a minority in Britain's oldest colony.

But this does not mean that we necessarily support the politics of the Provisionals, nor that we consider them socialists, nor that we support all the tactics they use. The politics of the Republican movement are rooted in the nationalist tradition of the late 18th century. Unlike socialists, who struggle for the self-emancipation of the working-class, the republicans aim for the emancipation of the Irish nation from British rule—and this affects the way they operate. They tend to see themselves acting *on behalf of* the people of Ireland, rather than organising mass action by the people themselves. The necessity for armed struggle, and the priority that the Provisionals give to it, obscure the even greater need to mobilise workers as a class against the British occupation and against the economic exploitation that this occupation defends.

Some of the tactics used by the Provisionals stem from this nationalist tradition and act as a barrier to the organisation of workers. Some of the bombing campaigns in Britain and Ireland have appeared directed against British workers rather than at the British state. Such tactics have made it easier for the British government, aided and abetted by the news media, to whip up anti-Irish hysteria and to create a climate in which repressive laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act could be introduced with the minimum opposition.

Recently, however, the Provisional IRA have moved significantly away from their old traditions and are more receptive to explicitly socialist ideas. This does not mean they have made a clean break with the politics of nationalism, but it is a step towards the struggle for a socialist republic.

But whatever criticisms we have of the politics of the Provisionals and other Republican groups, and their resulting tactics, we have to be clear that the people of Ireland have every right to control of their own country and the Provisionals are a leading force in that struggle.

But when it comes down to whether we back an army of occupation or the right of a people to control their own lives, our choice is simple. We demand that Britain stops interfering in the affairs of Ireland, just as we called for US withdrawal from Vietnam or Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan.



## Won't British withdrawal lead to a bloodbath?

TELL THE people of the housing estates of West Belfast or Derry that there's a risk of a bloodbath and you'll be laughed out of the room. There already *is* a bloodbath. Since the troops arrived in August 1969, more than 2000 people have been killed and thousands more maimed and injured. There is hardly a Catholic family in the North that hasn't suffered the tragedy of this war.

The presence of the British Army is the cause of most of this violence, and directly fuels the war. Who would be so naive as to believe that the gunning down of thirteen innocent people in Derry on Bloody Sunday would do anything but cause further violence? You don't have armies to 'keep the peace'. Armies are bands of men with guns. Their job is to fight wars, to preserve the established order by killing, maiming and terrorising its opponents—and that is exactly what they have been and are doing in the North of Ireland.

The presence of the army has another important effect. As long as the Loyalist population see their privilege and supremacy propped up by Britain, there is no reason they should think of co-operation with the Catholic minority. The army is the most important prop. If it were removed, they would have to abandon their present intransigent position.

Even today there are significant divisions in the Loyalist ranks. Withdrawal of the troops would put pressure on these divisions and could break the logjam of Loyalist ideology. Nobody would argue that such a development would be smooth or automatic. There may be a temporary increase in sectarian violence after the removal of the troops, but there is no way that half a million Catholics can be physically driven out of the North, and even an Ian Paisley would not pursue a civil war that could not be won.

It is the British Army which ensures the present deadlock and so the continuing violence. Only its removal will allow things to change.

## But how is change possible when the majority want to stay part of Britain?

'NORTHERN IRELAND shall remain an integral part of the UK as long as its population desires.' This is the basis of British policy in Northern Ireland, and may appear democratic. It isn't.

To appreciate its hypocrisy, we need only look back to previous government attitudes. In the 1918 Westminster elections, when all Ireland was part of the UK, there were 105 Irish seats. 73 were won by Sinn Féin—the political wing of the Republicans—and six by other nationalists. Clearly, a majority of the Irish people wanted independence. And the famous British concern for the wishes of the majority? It was nowhere to be seen.

The British government said: the south has voted for independence and the north-east has voted for the Unionists, so let's set up two states. This meant a new six-county state in the north, carved out of part of the nine-county province of Ulster. Imagine if British elections were run like this. Scotland, Wales and Northern England would long ago have been independent Labour-controlled states; other areas completely Conservative. It sounds crazy, doesn't it?

But there was a method in Britain's madness. In the early years of the 20th century the north-east of Ireland, particularly Belfast, was a leader in the world economy. Belfast's dominance over the Irish economy can be illustrated by a glance at one statistic. In 1907 Ireland exported £20.9 million worth of goods. Belfast accounted for a staggering £19.1 million of that total. Belfast was closely linked with Clydeside and Merseyside, then the centres of production and transport. Obviously an independent Ireland threatened not only British investment but the prosperous Belfast business class with which many top British business and political figures were linked.

In 1912 Bonar Law, the then Tory Prime Minister, said he could 'imagine no length of resistance in which I shall not be ready to support them.' With 25,000 rifles and 2½ million bullets being landed in Larne for the Protestant paramilitaries of the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1914, there must have been quite a few influential backers outside Ulster. The state of Northern Ireland was artificially and *undemocratically* created to preserve British wealth and influence.

The 'majority' which wishes to preserve this state of affairs, is a majority only in a statelet set up against the wishes of the majority of ALL Ireland's people. That sort of democracy is no democracy at all. Socialists must demand the right of the Irish people as a whole to self-determination.

## So what is the way forward?

THE DIVISION within the Irish working class, between Catholics and Protestant workers in the North and between workers North and South, is an immense and complex problem, yet one that socialists must face squarely. Is working-class unity a foolish dream? Or is it an attainable goal? If the latter, how can it be achieved?

Some argue that the divisions will not end until the link with Britain is broken and Ireland reunited. Others hold that the way forward lies in unity on everyday 'bread and butter' issues, playing down, ignoring, or even condemning the struggle against British domination.

It is certainly true that there have been times in the past when Catholic and Protestant workers *have* united around common problems such as low wages and unemployment, but such episodes are rare and have never lasted long. Sectarian divisions have always reappeared. But it is equally true that the struggle against British rule in the North, which sees no role for Protestant workers, will be continually frustrated. Is there any way out of this dilemma?

We believe there is.

James Connolly, Ireland's greatest revolutionary working-class leader, asked seventy years ago why Protestant workers who fought their masters on the *industrial* front were unwilling to take them on *politically* by opposing Unionism and British domination. Here is his answer:

'When the Sinn Feiner [Republican] speaks to men who are fighting against low wages and tells them that the Sinn Fein body has promised lots of Irish labour at low wages to any foreign capitalist who wishes to establish in Ireland, what wonder if they come to believe that a change from Unionism to Sinn Feinism would simply be a change from the devil they do know to the devil they do not know!'

In other words, the Protestant workers of the North have no reason to fight for a united capitalist Ireland, no wish to change from one set of bosses to another, especially when their existing rulers give them marginal privileges over Catholic workers. Nor does the prospect of domination by a powerful and thoroughly reactionary Catholic religious hierarchy, as in the South, hold any attractions.

But would they join the fight if it were for a united *socialist* Ireland? There is certainly some historical evidence to suggest that they would.

In 1934, left-wing Republicans who had broken away from the IRA joined with militant socialists to form an organisation called the Republican Congress. Its manifesto stated: '*We believe that a Republic of a United Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots capitalism on its way.*'

And that was no hollow slogan. Congress members involved themselves fully in workers' struggles, North and South, openly arguing

that British imperialism was the enemy of *all* workers, and never hiding the fact that they were totally opposed to Partition and British rule.

In the Protestant districts of Belfast, 'James Connolly Workers Republican Clubs' were set up, and hundreds of Protestant workers came out in support of the *Workers' Republic*. For the first time an organisation that advocated an end to the Partition of Ireland was actually challenging the forces of middle-class nationalism in a way that could attract Protestant working-class support.

Robert McVicar, a Shankill Road Protestant workers, gave an oration at Connolly's grave that summer. 'We are a body of Protestant workers, the vanguard of the working-class' he said, who had come from Belfast 'to pledge our determination . . . to do all we can to carry out the message of Connolly . . . to break all connection with England and to smash Irish capitalism.'

There it was in a nut-shell. The fight against British imperialism, integrated with the fight against Irish capitalism, *could* win over Protestant workers, *could* promote working-class unity. But before Congress could develop further along these lines it was wrecked by those within its ranks (including the Communist Party) who argued that it was premature to fight for the *Workers' Republic*, that they were still at the 'stage' of fighting for independence without socialism. Connolly had been forgotten.

During the last ten years of crisis in the North the Unionist all-class alliance has fallen apart. Protestant workers have deserted their old political masters *en masse*. But in the absence of any viable socialist alternative, which could show them that a united Ireland in the form of a *Workers' Republic* was in their interest as workers, they have moved not to the left, but to the right, to Paisley and the like.

The events of 1934 show that that was no 'natural' or 'inevitable' development. Nor is it irreversible. Let the Republican Congress have the last word:

'Sectarianism dies out slowly when the fight against it is one of words. Sectarianism burns out quickly where there is team work in common struggle.

'Those who see in Partition just a reflex of sectarian strife see no way forward except in foolish talk about toleration, charity, real religion, etc.

'Those who see in Partition the link between Irish capitalism and Imperial finance, see in the common struggle for the *Workers' Republic* the solution of Partition, and in the destruction of exploitation, the withering away of sectarian strife.'



## But there isn't much we can do, is there?

YES THERE IS.

Many trade unionists and even many who profess themselves socialists shy away from raising the Irish issue in their trade union branch or workplace. This is understandable, but not acceptable. The people of Britain have been prevented from hearing the truth about the North of Ireland for ten years. We have instead been subjected to British government propaganda and army hand-outs faithfully reproduced in the press, on radio and television. As a result, many people see only the racist stereotype of mad Irishmen blowing themselves to bits. With this image firmly fixed in their minds it is not surprising that they are hostile or indifferent to any attempt to put an alternative view.

But this is no excuse for us to duck the issue, or to regard it as just another 'good cause', a bit of a distraction from more pressing bread and butter issues such as wages, anti-union laws or public spending cuts. As socialists we support the struggle of the Irish people not out of a sense of sympathy, but out of basic solidarity.

The struggle in Ireland is a direct challenge to the claim of the British ruling class to rule in Ireland. As trade unionists we too challenge that claim to rule — to dictate our wages, to cut our hospitals, to deny us the right to defend our jobs and working conditions. We must show the same solidarity for the Irish resistance to British rule as we do for other workers in struggle against their employers here in Britain.

Be sure, to the employing class it is the same. They want to maintain their economic domination of Ireland just as they maintain their economic domination of the factories and workplaces of Britain. And they are quite willing to use the same methods if they have to.

The new technology of repression that has been tested on the streets of Northern Ireland is beginning to be felt in the streets of Britain. The idea of the Special Patrol Group (SPG) for breaking up demonstrations and pickets came from the RUC. There were RUC officers advising the Metropolitan Police at the Grunwicks picket line. And the army has again been used against trade unionists in Britain, during the Glasgow dustcart drivers' strike and the national firemen's strike of 1978.

In the last analysis, we support the struggle for Irish freedom because, as Karl Marx himself said of the British domination of Ireland: 'A nation which enslaves another cannot itself be free.' The struggle for socialism in this country will greatly assist the struggle for self-determination in Ireland, just as their struggle against our ruling class is a blow in support of our own emancipation.

## WHAT WE CAN DO

Support all initiatives in this country in solidarity with the Irish struggle—in particular the Charter '80 Campaign for Human Rights for Irish Political Prisoners, the Movement for Withdrawal from Northern Ireland, and the Troops Out Movement. Details of their activities can be found in Socialist Worker and other left papers.

Break the wall of silence around the Irish issue by arguing in your workplace and trade union branch to win support for these initiatives. Build the solidarity campaign within the trade unions. That way it can be strong enough to influence events in Ireland.

Join the Socialist Workers Party. A strong revolutionary socialist movement in Britain will undermine the ability of our ruling class to dominate in Ireland or elsewhere in the world.

## A NOTE ON THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT

THE PREVENTION of Terrorism Act, rushed through Parliament in the aftermath of the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974, was originally represented as a 'temporary provision' only. Roy Jenkins, then Home Secretary, said: 'These powers are draconian and in combination they are unprecedented in times of peace.' In plain language, the police got powers usually reserved for wartime. Existing legal rights were wiped out at a stroke. Under the Act 'terrorism' is defined as 'the use of violence for political ends', which has wide-reaching implications. (Of course, the use of the British Army in the streets of Northern Ireland is 'the use of violence for political ends' . . . but that's different.)

So far only the IRA has been proscribed, but other organisations could also be proscribed at the discretion of the Home Secretary. It is an offence to organise a public meeting which in any way supports a proscribed organisation, or to wear or display anything which suggests you are a member of or support such an organisation. The police have the right to arrest and search anyone, anywhere, at any time, and to seize property. A suspect can be held for seven days without access to a solicitor, and can be forcefully photographed and fingerprinted. The Prevention of Terrorism Act actually creates a new crime, that of 'withholding information'. The police have power to deport detainees by obtaining an 'exclusion order' from the Home Secretary. The police need give no reason for deportation.

Between November 1974 and the end of 1979, 4,524 people were detained under the Act. Only 49 of these were charged with offences under the Act, and of these twenty were acquitted! A further 249 detainees were charged with offences under other laws. Most of these charges alleged 'conspiracy' to commit an offence, not actual crimes, and seventy were later acquitted.

Of all those 4,524 people arrested, only 208 have been found guilty of any offence, and most of those were unrelated to terrorism. In addition 217 people have been deported. These are people against whom the police have no evidence for prosecution, but simply want out of the country.

To understand the real motive behind the Prevention of Terrorism Act, we must look at those it is directed against. Many of those detained are active trade unionists and socialists, journalists, students, and Irish workers seeking employment. Detainees are frequently questioned about political and trade union activities which are entirely legal. The police need not inform a detained person's family of their whereabouts or of their arrest. Many trade unionists have lost their jobs as a result of being detained.

For the 4,099 detained under the Act, held without charge and later released, the Act has been used simply as a means of police harassment.

Frequently, the Act is used against those publicising events in Ireland. It is an effective tool in maintaining censorship and preventing free discussion on Northern Ireland. The Irish population in Britain is intimidated by the threat of police harassment and arbitrary arrest. At the same time the Act wipes out hard-won legal and political rights and as such is a threat to the entire labour movement.

The Act has never been used against right-wing groups such as the paramilitary UDA or UVF.

What is more, last year the number of people detained jumped by 40 per cent: in 1978, 622 people were detained; in 1979, 857 were detained. This upsurge in the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act reflects the increasingly repressive policy of the British government, rather than any upsurge in terrorist activity. Can you remember any 'terrorist' incidents over the last few years which could merit such a high level of arrests? There were none.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act is paralleled in Northern Ireland by the Special Powers Act, also originally a 'temporary' measure. Both Acts have nothing to do with terrorism. They are attempts to defeat the Irish Republicans by repression rather than by removing the root cause of the war: British domination of the North of Ireland and the presence of British troops on Irish soil.

The implications of the PTA should be clear to all British socialists and trade unionists. If we allow the practices of the PTA to become acceptable, we are opening the door for similar laws to be used against British workers. Our economic and political masters will not hesitate, if we let them use such measures against those who threaten privilege in the North of Ireland, to use similar methods against workers who threaten their privileges here.

## A NOTE ON THE CAMPAIGN FOR POLITICAL STATUS

EVEN THE Tory government of 1970-74 recognised that those in prison as a result of activities in the conflict in the North of Ireland were political prisoners. The then Northern Ireland Secretary Willie Whitelaw granted them certain 'privileges' which confirmed that status. But British policy changed.

The Labour government that followed sought to isolate both Republican and Loyalist activists from support in their communities by portraying them as common criminals. New courts were set up under the guidance of Lord Diplock which made the conviction of people for 'terrorist' offences much easier. Juries were abolished, and the judge decided innocence or guilt on his own. More important, uncorroborated confessions were allowed as evidence.

For all those convicted under this new legal procedure all privileges given to earlier prisoners were withdrawn. In protest Republican prisoners and even a small number of Loyalists went on the 'blanket'. They refused to wear prison uniform and were left wrapped in only a blanket. They were denied proper toilet facilities and were subjected to regular beatings from the prison warders in the 'H' blocks of Long Kesh. Now 400 men in Long Kesh and 40 women in Armagh Jail are living in such conditions.

It took a long time to break the wall of silence that was erected around the appalling conditions of the 'H' blocks, but eventually the outside world began to wake up to the reality. Cardinal O'Faich, the leading Catholic churchman in Ireland, visited Long Kesh and protested that the men there were being treated worse than animals. In particular he drew attention to the fact that most had been convicted without a proper trial and on the basis of confessions extracted through torture. Torture of prisoners was confirmed by one of the police surgeons who worked in Castlereagh barracks; the Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg found Britain guilty of 'degrading and inhuman treatment of prisoners' and Amnesty International documented numerous case histories of those who had been subjected to torture.

The prisoners, supported by the Charter '80 Campaign, are demanding the right to political status, which means the right to wear their own clothes, the right to associate freely with other political prisoners, the right to refrain from prison work, the right to organise their own educational and recreational facilities and to receive one visit, one letter and one parcel a week, and the right to full remission of sentence.

The reason the British government deny these right (which were given to Republican prisoners in the past) is that they want to portray

the Republicans as a minority of criminals and terrorists, and not as a liberation movement which, as their own Army reports admit, has strong popular support. The government wants to hide the fact that a large section of the people of Northern Ireland are involved in what is, simply, a war against British military occupation. The Republicans are political prisoners of that war and should be treated as such.



## FURTHER READING

The best book on the struggle in Ireland today is Eamonn McCann's **WAR AND AN IRISH TOWN** (£1.95), while those who want to know more about the campaign for Troops Out should read **IRELAND: VOICES FOR WITHDRAWAL** (75p) and the monthly paper of the Troops Out Movement, itself titled **TROOPS OUT** (10p).

Two books cover the issue of political prisoners: **ON THE BLANKET** by Tim Pat Coogan (£2.50), and **IRISH VOICES FROM ENGLISH JAILS** (£1.95), which is produced by the Prisoners Aid Committee.

On the historical side, T A Jackson's **IRELAND HER OWN** (£1.50) is about the best overall book, while Michael Farrell's **NORTHERN IRELAND: THE ORANGE STATE** (£5.95) is undoubtedly the best analysis of the north. Others recommended are **IRELAND'S CIVIL WAR**, by Carlton Younger (£1.95), **THE IRA**, by Tim Pat Coogan (£2.50), **THE SINGING FLAME**, by Ernie O'Malley (£2.50), —also about the civil war and the IRA— and Nicholas Mansergh's expensive but recommended historical study **THE IRISH QUESTION 1840-1921** (£4.50).

The writings of James Connolly, Ireland's greatest socialist who was executed after the failure of the Easter Rising 1916, are to be found in **JAMES CONNOLLY: SELECTED WRITINGS**, edited by P Berresford Ellis (£3.50), and his biography in Samuel Levenson's **JAMES CONNOLLY** (£2.50).

Finally, **THE BRITISH MEDIA AND IRELAND** (50p) details the censorship and distortion that has characterised the British press and TV coverage of Ireland for the past 10 years.

*All these books are available through good left bookshops, or by post from the SWP's London bookshop, **BOOKMARKS**, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 (please add 10 per cent to cover the cost of postage).*

## Other publications from the Socialist Workers Party

### WHY YOU SHOULD BE A SOCIALIST by Paul Foot

The case for the Socialist Workers Party — and why we say socialism is the only solution to the crisis for working people.

50p plus 15p postage.

### WORKERS' POWER, NOT NUCLEAR POWER by Mike Simons

Looks at the appalling dangers and rotten safety record of the nuclear industry — and the politics behind our rulers' nuclear choice when all reason is against it.

50p plus 15p postage.

### RUSSIA: HOW THE REVOLUTION WAS LOST by Alan Gibbons

In 1917, for the first time in world history, a workers' government took power, in Russia. Out of the bloodbath of the First World War a new and better society was born. But within 20 years it was dead, murdered by a new class, a new despot — Stalin. Why did it happen?

35p plus 15p postage.

### NEVER AGAIN! The Hows and Whys of stopping fascism, by Colin Sparks

Fascism, born of the economic crisis of the 1930s, brought the barbarism and death camps of World War II. Now as another crisis deepens, it raises its head again . . .

£1.35 including postage.

### ROSA LUXEMBURG by Tony Cliff

Before she was murdered in Berlin during the German Revolution of 1919, Rosa Luxemburg made important contributions to socialist and Marxist thinking — on the role of the party, on imperialism, on the importance of strikes, on reform and revolution. This is a short account of her life and thought.

£1.35 including postage.

All available through your local Socialist Worker seller, or by post from

### SOCIALISTS UNLIMITED

265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

Send a stamped, addressed envelope for a full list of pamphlets, badges, cassettes and posters.

— plus of course

### SOCIALIST WORKER

15p every week.

Send £1 to receive the next five issues by post, to Circulation Department, PO Box 82, London E2.

BOOKMARKS  
07-902-6146  
30p

British troops were sent to 'keep the peace' in the North of Ireland in August 1969. Ten years and almost 2000 deaths later, the army remains on the streets. The violence that has followed their arrival has been far greater than what went before — and the political situation is deadlocked, further from a solution than ever.

In this pamphlet, we argue that the only way to break that deadlock and move forward to a solution that will benefit ALL the people of Ireland, Protestant and Catholic, is to get the troops out and get them out now. And we answer the argument of those who oppose this view.





**Title:** Why We Say: Troops Out of Ireland!

**Organisation:** Socialist Workers' Party [UK]

**Date:** 1980

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

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

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