



New Snouts in the Trough



INSIDE:

Framework Document: Peace without Justice

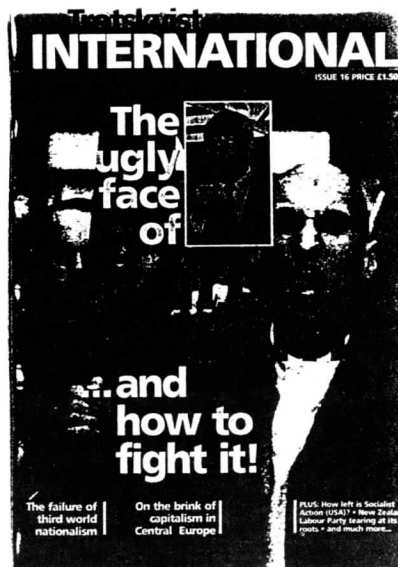
Defending the Truth about October 1917

Noonan Rolls Back X Case Gains

50p

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De Rossa joins Spring in bailing out the ruling class

For the first time, a new government has been put together without a general election. Inter-party coalitions are expected now to be the normal rather than the exceptional form of bourgeois government. While this is a blow to the traditions of Fianna Fáil, it represents new flexibility for the ruling class in arriving at solutions to Governmental crises without recourse to general elections.

AFTER THE GENERAL election at the end of 1991, when Labour won more seats than ever, Spring was in a position to choose coalition with either Fine Gael (as in 1983-87) or Fianna Fáil. He chose coalition with Albert Reynolds' party despite the bitterness and personalized hostility between the two leaders and their parliamentary parties. Had not Spring even testified against Reynolds & Co. in the Beef Tribunal!

The Labour-Fianna Fáil coalition represents a new level of class collaboration at the level of government. Here was a government with the biggest majority in the whole history of the southern state made up of a party with the affiliation of the decisive blue collar unions and a bourgeois nationalist party which has always got more working class votes than its stunted but pivotal labour partner.

The new coalition seemed to be a dramatic turnabout only in terms of

the rhetoric and personalized hostility among the parliamentarians.

In the event, the partnership with Fianna Fáil worked remarkably well because EU funds, in particular, had helped create relatively favourable economic conditions for the Coalition; and Reynolds for the time being kept Fianna Fáil compliant on the liberal 'social agenda' because it projected a more liberal profile to the urban areas where Fianna Fáil support had been worst hit.

Theatre of the absurd

Most significant of all was the success of the Spring-Reynolds partnership in concluding a peace deal with Gerry Adams.

What broke up the Coalition was, in its content, surprisingly minor. Labour was caught on a hook of its own making. In opposition from 1987-92 Spring directed a righteous political moralism with much effect

In the Cork by-election immediately before the recent government crisis, Democratic Left stressed their party's resolve not to sell out workers' interests by entering coalition as Labour has done! Their bluff was called much soon than they expected.

Just another wingbag!



against Fianna Fáil. Now in office he continued setting himself up as the champion of scrupulous political honesty and governmental transparency. Even Reynolds mimicked this rhetoric!

Fianna Fáil's political culture, however, is irreconcilable with any such political virtue, and the 'pragmatic businessman' honest-politician Reynolds could not resist even minor temptations to trade passports for foreign investment in his own company, and to reward a Fianna Fáil Attorney General with presidency of the High Court.

Reynolds conflict with Spring over the Report of the Beef Tribunal remained a source of tension and friction, but ironically Spring played this one down even though it had involved Reynolds literally locking Labour ministers out of Government Buildings while Reynolds presented the Tribunal report selectively to the media.

The Report did in fact largely exonerate him, but only because his Attorney General had fixed it so he didn't have to disclose incriminating Cabinet proceedings to the Tribunal! But Reynolds was such a twister, such a lone ranger, such a crook himself that he found it impossible to fully trust the state machine, in the form of the top civil servants even when they were obviously acting to protect him.

The final trip-wire was Reynolds attempt to promote the Attorney General. Spring made a public show of opposition but compromised. He was strongly egged on by party advisors, however, men who were more strongly opposed to promoting Harry Whelehan. He had, after all, been responsible for the anti-abortion injunction on a 14-year old rape victim in 1992, but much more grievously, he had taken a constitutional case which made Cabinet discussions immune from judicial inquiry in the course of the Beef Tribunal, protecting Reynolds and damaging Spring in 1991 before the coalition.

With an unbroken streak of luck that kept him just a hair's breadth from political ridicule, Spring milked

the issue of the Attorney General's promotion for all the moral rectitude he could get out of attacking Fianna Fáil while earnestly seeming not to want to plunge the country and the peace process above all into political crisis.

He was in reality desperate to pull back from the brink. At the last moment, he signed a note promising to save the Government in the critical confidence vote. But Reynolds' instinctual parsimony with the truth, his ministerial cronies' stupidity, and the accident of Spring finding out who told whom what and when, just minutes before the debate started, forced Spring to bring down the Government over what appeared to be a relatively minor issue of whether or not there was a precedent for the extradition of the child abuser Fr. Smyth.

In effect, however, the scale of the crimes of Fr. Smyth and the delay in extraditing this notorious and hypocritical child abuser rapidly became a source of justified national outrage and a concentrated symbol of the corruption which Fianna Fail had covered up for years.

Whelehan's mistake, in strict formal legal terms, was that he had not known that his office had dealt with a precedent—the Y case (Duggan case). This, however, meant that his office could not claim unavoidable delay in extraditing Fr. Smyth on the grounds that it had to ponder new issues of time—limitations on immunity from extradition for charges on sex abuse of children, some of which were perpetrated more than twenty years previously.

The melodrama and exaggerations surrounding the crisis subjected the Irish political establishment, and church-state relations, and the legal profession, to a very progressive and popular barrage of abuse and criticism. The involvement of bishops in turning a blind eye to incidents of child sex abuse by clergy was highlighted for weeks, weakening the public authority of the hierarchy.

Much was revealed about the petty mechanisms of political power. And in the process some minor pro-

Labour and Democratic Left joined with Fine Gael to form the government under John Bruton. This aligned the reformists, left reformists and 'christian democrats' while excluding the neo-liberals (Progressive Democrats) and putting into opposition the populist Fianna Fail.

Once again, it was the working class parties which acted to preserve the system of two alternating capitalist parties as the basis for alternative bourgeois governments. To maintain formal working class independence would have meant Labour and Democratic Left voting against governments nominated by either Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. Their duty to the working class was to force these parties either to liquidate their sham differences or to call an election.

As reformists both parties are parliamentary cretinists and forcing Fianna Fail and Fine Gael to rule nakedly for the bosses would have weakened worker illusions in them and aided class struggle—the last thing either Democratic Left or the Labour Party want.

Labour feared decimation at the polls, Democratic Left the new expense so soon after a general election and a costly bye-election, so neither wanted what the people clearly wanted—a general election.

Finally, neither Democratic Left nor Labour were capable of resisting the corruption, spoils and "prestige" of ministerial power. The latter would, in addition, copperfasten Democratic Left's achievement of full bourgeois-constitutional legitimacy. It have them the respectable tag so desperately needed by a party harangued by the media for its paramilitary past.

This surrender of the political independence of the working class is more complete than on previous occasions in that it includes also the 'left' reformist Democratic Left which had captured a base in the working class, even if this was primarily in its labour aristocratic strata and elements of the radical petty bourgeoisie, precisely through its appearance of rejecting Labour and attacking its treachery in coalition.

Democratic Left had revealed its appetite for coalition in negotiations with Spring after the last general election but it ended up one seat short of clinching a deal. In the Cork bye-elections immediately before the recent government crisis, Democratic Left propaganda stressed their party's resolve not to sell out workers' interests by entering coalition as Labour had done! Their bluff was called much sooner than they expected. Only a third of their special conference opposed the decision to go into coalition in late December.

By their actions...

The programme of the new government makes tiny concessions to pressures from the working class e.g. a promise to delimit the power of county managers to cut off non-paying residents from water and rubbish services for which unpopular service charges have been introduced. It promises a divorce referendum this year for the third time!

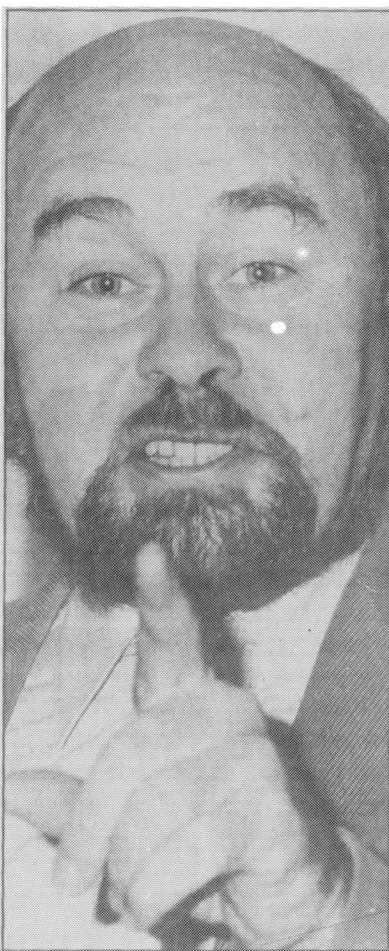
The government breakup revealed that both Labour and Fianna Fáil had secretly agreed to put off as long as possible the issue of abortion information and to put off forever any legislation to implement the Supreme Court ruling to permit abortion to save the mothers life. We know this only because of Labour's disgraceful one-up-man-ship with Fianna Fail in the wake of Reynold's leak to the media concerning proposed legislation on abortion.

Howlin boasted that it was Labour and not Fianna Fail which were the first to ditch their promise to deal with the substantive issue of abortion. Labour were clearly signalling to the bosses and to the church that they could be relied upon better than Fianna Fail to trample on women's right to choose to terminate unwanted pregnancies.

To pre-empt the anti-abortionists and to rout Fianna Fáil, the Coalition over 10 days in March, rammed through a Bill to regulate abortion information. It almost totally negates the minor gain of the constitutional amendment of November 1992.

De Rossa for years deluded women activists and the left that he was the parliamentary champion of womens rights against all others. And even now he makes speeches in favour of positive abortion rights while perpetrating this shameful fraud on women.

Incredibly, it is Labour which has taken the Finance ministry—a ministry that is normally the focus of cuts and austerity and for that reason it is normally avoided by social democratic parties in coalition pacts.



Ho Chi Quinn is daily proving his financial rectitude on behalf of Irish capitalism. He reduced corporation tax and abolished the bank levy—the only levy ever imposed on the banks in this state. In contrast to his generosity to the employers, the budget offered social welfare increases for the unemployed which barely kept pace with inflation.

For the moment, however, the

budget surplus and the abundance of incoming EU funds make it possible for him to reduce labour costs for employers by reducing social-welfare deductions without any new attack on social welfare benefits.

Concerned to hold on to the greatly increased lower middle-class and labour aristocratic support they won in 1991, Labour has abolished university fees for the children of the electoral prospects will improve as a result of this measure, and given the boom in the world economy and in the Republic—and assuming there is no major upsurge of class struggle, Labour seems well positioned to hold on to most of its gains.

Main loser

Democratic Left is likely to be the main loser in the coalition. More is expected of it than of Labour as it, unlike the Labour Party, has been up till now primarily a left reformist party. Already Democratic Left has lost one councillor who opposed coalition and De Rossa has been pilloried because of the huge disappointment the budget represented to the long term unemployed and old age pensioners.

Mike Allen, leader of the meek-and-mild Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) and a Democratic Left supporter was not impressed by these developments. The party also faces defections from its left wing to the far left. De Rossa's nifty privatisation of the the Local Loans Fund will only harden their resolve to go.

This intensified class collaboration at the level of government, supported by the social partnership of employers and unions, is a significant gain for the Irish bourgeoisie.

Socialists and militants, against all the odds, must not give an inch in arguing and fighting to force Labour and Democratic Left out of coalition, as a key political slogan in defending the working class, women, the poor and democratic rights against the gathering forces of a Europe-wide capitalist offensive against all the gains of the post-war decades. ■

THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT: Peace Without Justice

IT IS NO EXAGGERATION TO say that the Framework document represents the most serious attempt to deal with the Irish national question since the partition of Ireland was instituted in 1920-1922.

The ground for the document was laid in the Hume-Adams document, the taking of the lead in the peace process by Major and Reynolds which resulted in the Downing St. Declaration, and the ceasefires by the IRA and the loyalist assassination squads.

Support for Unionist consent, if not for a positive Unionist veto, was already delivered by Adams in the Hume-Adams agreement. When this was added to by a ceasefire in August 1994, Major and Reynolds saw a chance for a new initiative. Like Sunningdale, serious concessions would be offered to the anti-Unionists in the North, but in circumstances now far more favourable for imperialism and its Southern Irish collaborators. There was more than a fair chance that a neo-Sunningdale strategy would succeed.

First of all the principle of Unionist consent, written all over the Downing St. Declaration would continue in the new agreement and this would be a major factor, not present in Sunningdale or the Anglo-Irish Agreement, in neutralising Unionist obstruction.

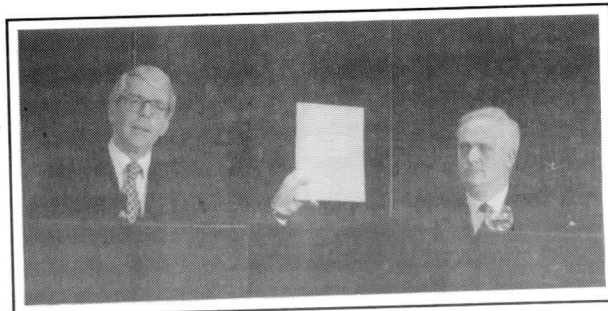
Secondly, the unionists could be blamed for undermining the precious peace if they did not seriously negotiate a balanced agreement that would be "fair" to "both sides of the Northern conflict".

And thirdly, the guerilla struggle of the IRA would not be there as it was, as a major factor of instability in the last two attempts at a stitch up.

Role of North/South Institutions

The most controversial factor regarding North/South institutions is the proposal for a North/South Body (NSB) with executive powers which would be all-Ireland in scope. The NSB would operate by agreement between Northern Assembly deputies and Southern TDs or ministers.

It would have a range of functions overseen by Committee chairs in the North (effectively Northern Ministers) and Ministers from Dail Eireann. The NSB could oversee or discharge "executive, harmonising and consultative functions" which the British and Irish Governments would initially delegate, but which could be supplemented by agreement between the North and South.



In addition the NSB would have the right to propose the expansion of its own powers. The delegation of EU matters is anticipated, especially those of a "cross Border or island-wide nature".

The Framework document covers virtually every imaginable side of public policy apart from the obvious exemptions—the crown, foreign affairs and security. Within the functions devolved to Northern Ireland the British Government declares that it has "no limits" of its own to impose on the scope or content of the functions which could be delegated to the NSB. However, it is important to note that the NSB is to be established and maintained by the Westminster parliament and Dáil Eireann and not the Northern Assembly.

In addition, compulsory participation on the NSB is envisaged. The nature of the NSB is suitably vague. It can be sold by the Provos as an embryonic Irish federal level of government ranging across the whole nation. And, perhaps, it can be sold to the unionists as a set of inter governmental arrangements between sovereign states aimed at rational co-operation of a mainly economic kind. Its functions, if it comes to be, will be a big source of dispute.

East/West Structures

East/West Structures is jargon for relations between the British and Irish governments. Under the Framework document, the standing Inter-Governmental Conference, set up by the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, will be maintained. It will be able to handle all issues not devolved to the NI Assembly or not the direct responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (NI). It will have the duty to "promote, support and underwrite" the anticipated agreement arising out of the document. The two governments and the Inter-Governmental Conference will seek to arrive at common positions but where this is not

possible they will agree a procedure "to resolve the differences between them". This may represent a willingness by the British Government to accept mediation and even arbitration over disputed issues.

Northern Ireland Institutions

There is a commitment to a Bill of Rights for a reformed NI with the emphasis on civil, political and cultural rights but with a commitment—for what its worth—to "the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, gender or colour". In addition to all this there is paragraph 47—in which the British and Irish governments are presenting the Unionists with the Hobson's choice of having the basics of the document implemented in "dialogue" with them; or if they refuse dialogue, without them and over their heads."

Framework Supplements

One of the supplements to the main document is entitled 'Framework for accountable government in Northern Ireland'. It is the plan of the British imperialist ruling class, envisaged as subordinate to the Framework document plan, for a new North. It can be summarised as follows:

Executive: The creation of a collective "presidency" is envisaged—called a "panel". This collective presidency or panel is to be elected separately from the Assembly. It will have important powers—the right to veto proposals made by the Assembly, to play a role in the nomination of chairs of the Assembly, to refer legislative proposals to the courts and to be involved in public finance. The panel is to operate unanimously—which gives powers of veto to any of its members. The number is open to negotiation—three being envisaged in the document.

Legislative: A 90 member NI Assembly is recommended. The reason for this number is that NI is now to have 18 seats in Westminster and the districts for the new Assembly will be based on these seats—each of which will return five members. Using the single transferrable vote system (STV) in five member constituencies will produce very proportional results—which will be "fair" to smaller parties like Sinn Féin. However, the precise electoral rules to be used are left open to negotiation.

Weighted majorities

The new assembly will be far from the old Stormont—in which exclusively majority rule prevailed. Provisions for 'weighted majorities' for controversial legislation will prevent simple majority dominance, as will the presidential veto. Nor will the assembly be able to bring down the separately elected collective presidency or panel.

Nor will it—to work—require any formal coalition arrangements between any of the parties. What is envisaged is a carve up of committees and committee chairs in accordance with party strength. The principal role of these committees is to oversee the work of the NI departments.

Imperialism Backs the Deal

THE WHOLE OF WORLD IMPERIALISM and its new world order is behind the Irish peace process and its most important strategic initiative—the Framework document.

The British imperialist ruling class itself is so firmly behind the initiative as to guarantee a bi-partisan approach across the Tory/Labour divide. In 1922 the partition of Ireland was not the preferred option of the British Government. But the protestant minority in Ireland had powerful allies in the British ruling class and the profoundly undemocratic partition was carried through.

The majority of Irish people, who voted for independence in the election of 1918, never accepted the violation of their democratic rights. Britain went to war to prevent independence. Now, hypocritically, using the rhetoric of the right of self-determination for the people of Ireland, the British government is engaged in a protracted process of decolonisation, as self-interested as any that it carried out in the 1950s in Africa or Asia.

Despite their reticence at the time there were sound reasons for the British bosses keeping part of the North of Ireland. Today it is a dwindling asset. There are no military reasons for securing the "western approaches" to Britain by garrisoning the six counties. Belfast is no longer an important part of an engineering, shipbuilding and defence sector, integrated into the political economy of British capitalism within the wider Empire.

For the past 25 years the British state has been engaged in a low intensity, expensive war that, by its own admission, it cannot win—even if it can avoid defeat at the hands of the IRA. Periodic bombing campaigns in Britain have been embarrassing, disruptive and on occasion very damaging to business.

As long as Britain was not pushed out of Ireland by a revolutionary struggle there was much to be gained by a settlement. The role of the US, backed by an Irish diaspora of tens of millions strong cannot be underestimated. This is thrown into sharp relief by Clinton's visa for Adams to raise funds in the US. (Major's objections are countered with the reminder that Adams is allowed to raise funds in the UK!) The price is, of course, that Sinn Féin is now compelled to put disarmament on the agenda.

The Southern ruling class are unanimous supporters of the strategy in the Framework documents. Apart from a nuance of difference on articles 2 & 3, Bruton is maintaining a line remarkably consistent with that of his predecessor Reynolds. In particular he is insisting that disarmament, along with issues of policing and prisoners, be realistically addressed in talks.

The real obstacle to the Framework document is not Sinn Féin, but the Unionists. If they refuse to agree anything but their own idea of a devolved government, that will be unacceptable to Sinn Féin and the SDLP, then the British Government will have to decide whether to go over the heads of the Unionist politicians and appeal to their supporters in a referendum, or simply by-pass them and increase London-Dublin co-operation. ■

Devolved security: The British army is to stay as long as is necessary for it to back up the police. However, a radically reformed police is envisaged subject to the Assembly police committee and, most likely, it will be regionalised to make it acceptable to and joinable by anti-Unionists. In a slightly longer perspective such a radically reformed police force may have as back up the RIR—with a lot more NI and Southern catholics deliberately recruited into it, thus enabling withdrawal of the rest of the

British Army to Britain.

Constitutional: Britain's specific proposals on this issue state:

...the current constitutional status of Northern Ireland will not change, save with the consent of a majority of the people of NI, clearly expressed.

This is an underwriting of the Unionist veto as in the Downing St. Declaration. Nevertheless Britain commits itself to repealing the Government of Ireland Act (1920) as quid pro quo for changes or abolition of

Articles 2 & 3 of the South's Constitution.

However, Britain is not giving much here as both the NI Constitution Act 1973 and the Anglo-Irish Agreement clearly define NI as part of the UK and clearly underwrite the Unionist veto.

Nevertheless, the Southern bourgeoisie will amend articles 2 & 3 as required—while retaining the "birthright" i.e. the citizenship of the Republic of all in the North who want to avail of it. ■

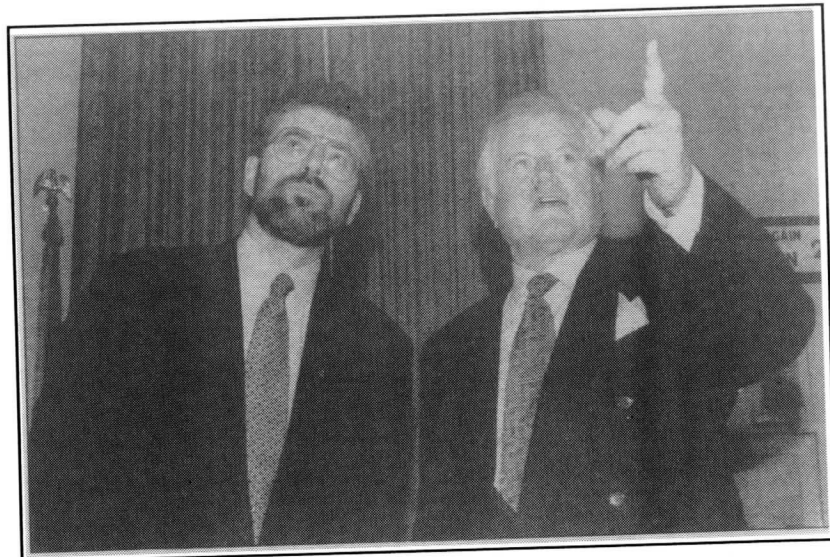
SINN FEIN Anti-imperialism disarmed?

IN 1974 GERRY ADAMS was commander of the IRA's West Belfast Brigade. That year Sinn Féin and the IRA denounced the Sunningdale proposals for a Council of Ireland and a power-sharing executive in the North. They said that it was a betrayal of republicanism's goal of a united Ireland.

Twenty-one years on, the new framework document contains very similar proposals to the Sunningdale Agreement signed by the Tories, Dublin and the SDLP. But this time Gerry Adams has welcomed the framework document because "its ethos is for one-Ireland and an all-Ireland arrangement."

So what has changed? The short answer is, Gerry Adams and the Republican movement's view of British imperialism.

The FD is a most serious attempt to conciliate anti-unionists, and thereby preserve and consolidate the IRA ceasefire. It goes beyond Sunningdale in terms of concessions to anti-unionists. It intends to ride out the opposition of the Unionists through a combination of economic and political persuasion and blackmail and where necessary, coercion.



Taking lectures from the imperialists.

Sinn Féin no longer see a united Ireland as an immediate revolutionary democratic demand, realisable by smashing the RUC and kicking out the British troops by armed struggle.

Rather, a united Ireland is a long term aspiration, part of their maximum programme. They believe it will draw closer because the British want to withdraw. Adams and

McGuinness came to the conclusion several years ago that their own armed struggle, whilst it helped create this desire to go, had become dysfunctional, since it gave the protestants the pretext to blackmail successive British governments.

Sinn Féin has accepted the need to persuade the Unionists rather than use violence to coerce them into a



Sinn Féiners congratulate themselves at the recent Ard Fheis.

united Ireland. They expect a future British government with the support of the USA to play a role in persuading the loyalists. This means that the Republican leadership has accepted a constitutionalist perspective.

In the end, what they failed to achieve in the last 25 years through the ballot and the bomb, they hope to achieve in the next 25 years through demographic changes and economic co-operation in a deepening European Union federal state.

But that is the music of the future. What really animates Adams today is the desire to get Sinn Féin involved in direct all-party discussions on the framework document. This is crucial if the Republican rank and file are to feel that the ceasefire has put their leaders in a position of influence in bourgeois politics.

To get even this far Adams will have to negotiate with the IRA on demilitarisation. Without this the Unionists will simply block Sinn Féin's integration into all-party talks. If and when such discussions get under way, Adams will have to be seen to be making progress on clearing up the wreckage of twenty plus years of war.

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In return for demilitarisation Sinn Féin will push for an amnesty for Republican prisoners. This will probably be conceded, in tandem with the release of loyalist prisoners to assuage any danger of a protestant backlash, in a series of stages, based on the seriousness of the offences.

Sinn Féin will also need to secure a major reform of the military-police presence in the catholic ghettos. Again this will probably take the form of a timetable of troop withdrawals, to follow on the "back to barracks" move.

A reform of the RUC, its "desectarianisation", will also be

necessary. As events in late February in Derry illustrated, the RUC remains a loyalist state machine, still capable of running amok.

But its reform to the satisfaction of republicans could only be accomplished by mass recruitment of catholics, possibly of former IRA volunteers, and a community policing system.

Last but not least, Sinn Féin will have to participate in any "power-sharing" assembly in order to get a share of EU and US grants for the community it represents.

The barriers within the Republican movement against Adams implementing his side of the "bargain" are at the moment very weak. They consist of the Republican hardliners—the one third or so of the IRA army council that opposed the ceasefire, and marginal elements like Republican Sinn Féin and Bernadette McAliskey.

But the anti-Unionist working class at the moment is still, by and large, enjoying the immediate results of the ceasefire too much to feel disillusioned by the limited fruits of political negotiations about a long-term settlement. ■

Unionist Bloc Fragments

MOST BUSINESSMEN in Northern Ireland are Unionists. Yet the Northern Ireland CBI Chairman, Doug Riley, welcomed the framework document:

Growing the economy of the whole of Ireland is in everyone's interests... where an all-Ireland context is seen to be the most effective approach, then we will support it.

Pat Duggan, chief executive of Mackie International and leading Ulster manufacturer, was even more strident:

I am not afraid to say I favour cross-border bodies. We need to integrate our economy with that of the south.

In contrast, Unionist politicians were denouncing the framework document weeks before it was published—although opinion polls showed the protestant grass roots to be less extreme.

When it finally emerged Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Ian Paisley attacked it for pointing down "a one-way street to a united Ireland". His deputy, Peter Robinson denounced it for serving Ulster with "an eviction notice to leave the United Kingdom." The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) were hardly friendlier.

Triple lock

Why is there such a difference between the economic and political leaders of Northern Ireland? On the face of it the framework document gives the Unionists a number of guarantees against a united Ireland. Any changes need the consent of all the parties, the consent of a majority of the people in the six counties and the consent of Westminster - the so-called "triple lock".

But the shrill denunciations by Paisley on each radio interview, the walking out of TV studios by UUP leaders when a Sinn Féin spokesperson comes on the phone, all reflect the fear that real economic and political changes are underway which will erode the privilege of the Unionists. This is precipitating the fragmentation of Unionism along class lines.

During the early years after partition, Unionism spoke with one voice. The anti-Unionist population faced a unified bloc of reactionary classes, the so-called "Orange bloc".

The Unionist bourgeoisie sponsored and nurtured this cross-class alliance with the protestant labour aristocracy and middle class from the 1880s onwards as a bulwark against the growing claims of the nationalist movement for independence.

Independence (i.e. separation from the United Kingdom) spelled doom for the Unionist bourgeoisie since they were, at that time, a relatively well integrated part of the British ruling class. Their fundamental wealth and property were based on British and Empire markets. Continued access to these was essential. When the British could neither retain the whole of Ireland as a colony, nor grant all of it in-

dependence (both considered as better options in Westminster), then they conceded to the partition claims of the Unionist bourgeoisie.

Inherent stability

Pogroms, ethnic cleansing and gerrymandering were all after effects of the birth of the Six County state of Northern Ireland in the 1921-23 period. It was specifically a "protestant state for a protestant people", designed to defend and extend the "protestant ascendancy". Hence its permanent and inherent instability.

The local state machine, with considerable autonomy and devolved powers, persecuted its "disloyal" minority-republicans, catholics. It could neither integrate them as equals, nor allow them to unify with their southern majority.

The Unionist bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy promoted all this so long as they needed this state as a necessary political arrangement to guarantee their continued economic power.

But the pattern of trade and production of the Unionist bourgeoisie has changed considerably since the Second World War. Its main markets are not the rest of the UK but elsewhere in Europe or the Americas.

Most foreign investment into Northern Ireland does not originate in the UK. Common membership of the EC since 1973 has harmonised many business rules and regulations between Northern Ireland and the South, despite the low level of trade between the two.

Thus there is no obvious reason why the Unionist bosses could not consider alternative political arrangements if these arrangements create the prospect of greater social stability (and investment). The key would be that this outweighs the definite advantages that currently arise from having a permanently divided working class, with the lowest wages in the UK, amongst them.

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But it is not simply within the power of the Unionist bourgeoisie to dissolve the Orange bloc. There is the small matter of the protestant working class and presbyterian middle-class.

While the dominance of protestant-Unionist big business in Northern Ireland is assured whatever the political arrangements, what cannot survive the dissolution of the old institutions of protestant rule are the privileges of the protestant working class and lower middle class.

Important and previously dominant sections of the protestant middle class and working class are desperate to keep a hold on to the machinery of privilege in order to keep themselves above the conditions of their catholic counterparts.

The DUP see proportional representation, and any voice for Dublin, as inevitably weakening their ability to maintain those privileges. The DUP's middle class following are mostly fundamentalist presbyterian bigots who will not be persuaded to accept reform under any circumstances. The DUP's working class following could face massive lay-offs from the scaling down of the British and Ulster security machine and the final application of rationalisation to the "old" industries of the North East. That is why Paisley and the DUP are intransigent opponents of the framework document.

Sunningdale agreement

In 1974 Unionism was united and strong enough to launch a reactionary general strike to destroy the Sunningdale agreement, which was very similar in many respects to the latest initiative.

Today things are different. Firstly, the Unionist ruling class does not speak with one voice on relations with Dublin or the benefits of economic co-operation within the EU.

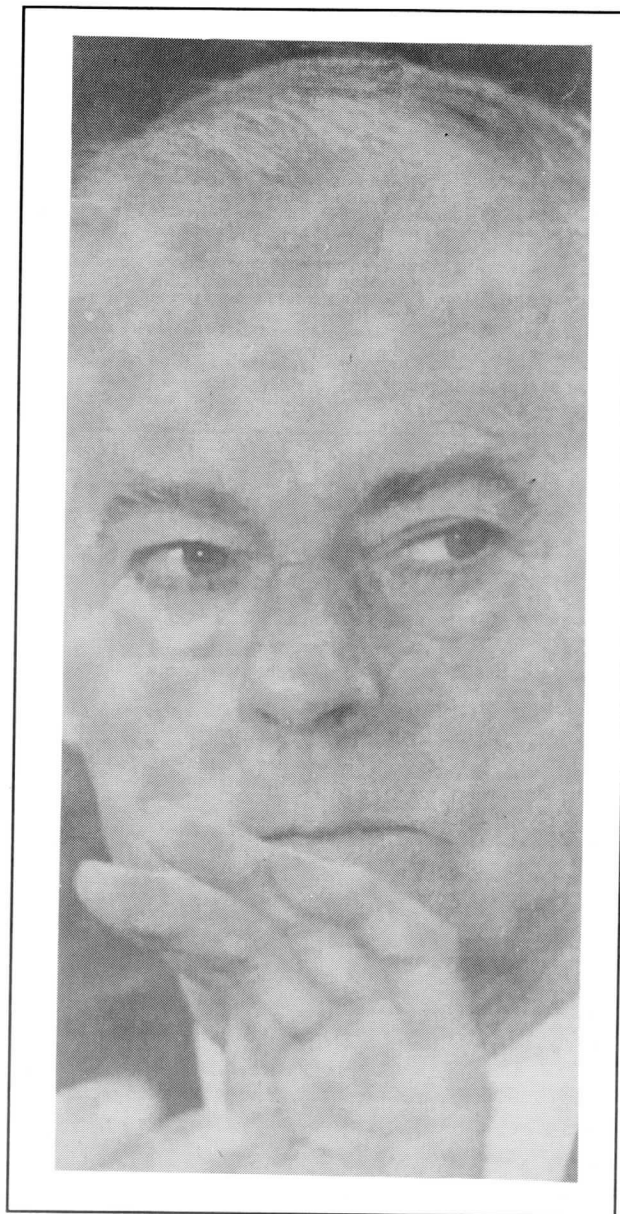
Second, the raw industrial muscle of the protestant working class has been much reduced. Third, and most important, the Sunningdale agreement was denounced by the IRA and protestant paramilitaries of the UDA. Sunningdale was meant to get agreement to bring about an end to the armed struggle. It failed. In 1995 the framework document is launched after the armed struggle has been conditionally abandoned, on both sides.

This has further divided the protestant community, with many workers placing the continuation of non-violence above constitutional issues. The enthusiasm of the loyalist paramilitaries and their tiny parties (PUP, UDP) to come in from the cold, and their conditional welcome for the framework document, further erodes Unionist unity.

The DUP could be outflanked in the inner city areas by the overtly "working class", if totally reactionary, paramilitary parties. As a result of these divisions at the moment the Unionist opponents of the peace process are utterly unable to halt it and have so far been unable to mobilise significant forces to protest against it.

The sidelining of Molyneaux as leader of the UUP and the key figure in Unionist support of the peace process, is significant. Desperate to placate the Unionists, Hume and others have gone so far as to accord the Unionists' own 'document' equal status as 'merely for discussion'.

While nobody really believes that both documents will have the same status, this may prove to be a useful



mechanism which can be used to bring unionists to the table without losing face or endangering the peace process. The bigots in the DUP and UUP have to be prepared to exercise their vetoes in full knowledge that they will be blamed for a resumption of the armed struggle. In the months ahead pressure will mount on Molyneaux, or his successor, and on Paisley: from their rank and file, from the CBI and from the British government.

Also, Molyneaux's isolation undermines the previously overwhelming consensus in the Conservative party, suddenly creating a significant caucus who are prepared to bloc with Unionist opposition and to demand that Britain "should be a persuader for the Union" in the peace process.

The peace process may yet be determined by Major's weakness in the face of internal dissent on Ireland, Unionist withdrawal of support, and continued harassment by the Euro-sceptic lobby. But, ultimately, if "Ulster Says No" again then direct rule, renewed anti-Unionist revolt and further Dublin-London collaboration over the Unionists' heads are the likely alternatives. ■

Abolish the Sectarian State

THE IRA CEASEFIRE began on 31 August 1994 and that of the loyalist paramilitaries on 13 October. British Army daytime patrols ceased in November. Since then, apart from the odd IRA punishment shooting and RUC provocation, the streets have been quiet. Catholics and protestants drive their cars to the city centre again for a night out. The pubs are fuller than they have been for years.

The peace is real, if fragile. The fact that ordinary working class people enjoy peace is completely understandable. But at what price is peace being bought? If the peace does little or nothing to alter the fundamentals of most workers' social and economic existence then the peace will not last.

Revolutionary socialists never advocated the strategy of armed struggle by a few hundred IRA volunteers against a huge military force such as the British Army. It could never achieve its declared aim of forcing the British out. Eventually, Adams and the Unionist leadership accepted this fact.

But they have drawn the wrong lessons. They are prepared to hand over the arms accumulated by the IRA, provided that there is demilitarisation on the British side. They are prepared to do this because they think that it is inevitable that, some way down the road, the British will leave the North and Ireland will be united.

This is totally naive. To enter the talks the IRA will be made to surrender much of its weaponry. The British state will have a monopoly of armed force again in Northern Ireland. Once disarmed it will be difficult for the nationalist community to defend itself from loyalist or state attacks. The same is not true of the British, or the protestants with their close connections to the British state.

That is why revolutionary socialists opposed the ceasefire. We do not want a continuation or a resurrection of a low level, ineffective guerrilla campaign. We want a mass political movement, against British rule and for a 32 county Irish workers' republic.

But it would be a mistake to extend that peace to the Unionist and British bosses in the North, or capitalists in the South. It is necessary to take advantage of the present peace to wage a war—an economic and political class war—against all the enemies of social justice.

But the ceasefire was not designed to place the weaponry under the control of the anti-Unionist community or to switch the anti-imperialist struggle over to mass political protest.

It is naive to disarm and place your faith in a policy of self-interest on the part of the British government before substantial political reform is in place. Sinn Féin will argue that demilitarisation by the IRA is the price that must be paid for the release of prisoners, the reform of the RUC and the dismantling of Army observation posts.

But there has always been another way to achieve these things other than trade-offs around the table, one which Workers Power and our Irish

comrades in the Irish Workers Group have consistently fought for: mass action, strikes, demonstrations and an all Ireland fight against exploitation and oppression.

But justice is not simply or mainly about retaining a capacity for an armed defence of an oppressed community.

Many workers in Derry and West Belfast commented, on reading the framework document, that it said nothing about jobs or services. When unemployment in parts of Catholic communities is doggedly stuck at levels of 20% people can be forgiven for wondering what's so great about more political rights.

If there is no commitment to use them to improve the lives of people, no commitment to give an elected assembly the resources for education and job creation, what use will these rights be?

And what is so great about unity with the South when its government cannot guarantee jobs for 20% of its own population, when it insists on holding wages down year after year in the public sector? These are legitimate concerns of protestant workers.

When peace means freedom from the fear of being attacked by a loyalist death squad or of having your house ripped apart by the British Army this can only be welcomed.

But it would be a mistake to extend that peace to the Unionist and British bosses in the North, or capitalists in the South. It is necessary to take advantage of the present peace to wage a war—an economic and political class war—against all the enemies of social justice.

Revolutionary socialists fight for a united Ireland. The division of the workers into two states and two antagonistic communities within one

of those states has served no one but the Orange, Green and British bosses for the last seventy years.

But a united Ireland will not come about by reconciling churches or "traditions". The protestant workers can only really fight for a decent life if they break their ties with their bosses. Above all, this means breaking with the defence of the sectarian statelet and their privileges over the catholic workers.

That this is possible can be seen in the present divisions within the Unionist camp in the reaction to the peace process. Unfortunately, because the protestant workers have the least to gain from a capitalist united Ireland, at present many are amongst the most solid opponents of the peace deal.

But a class-based appeal to break with the orange bloc could persuade sections of protestant workers to side with their catholic brothers and sisters, against all bosses, and all reactionary religions, north and south.

In breaking with their reactionary past protestant workers do not have to reconcile themselves to Irish nationalism. On the contrary, they can only be won over if anti-imperialists place themselves in the forefront of the fight against all that is reactionary in the Irish Republic, especially the overbearing influence of the church in the affairs of state and on the conduct of private life.

Neither protestant nor catholic worker has anything to fear from an Irish workers republic. It would be totally secular while providing for all

Woman confronts a British soldier.



Women occupy UTV headquarters in protest at their running of ads for the RUC.

religious faiths to be pursued privately without fear of persecution.

A workers' republic could even grant to any part of Ireland any form of autonomy that the democratic majority living there wished, providing this did not entail privileges for

that community or oppression for another community.

None of this is to be found in the framework document since its purpose is to bring about a political accommodation between the various interests of British, Orange and Green capitalists within Europe. Its

aim is to stabilise a regime of capitalist exploitation for the 21st century.

It seeks to placate and soothe the antagonistic "traditions". Our aim is to replace them all with working class international solidarity and the all-Ireland workers' republic. ■

- No surrender of weapons
- Force the British Army out and disband the RUC and RIR
- Release anti-imperialist prisoners
- End repression and scrap all repressive legislation
- Build a united front of workers, socialists and republicans to fight around the above demands
- For an All-Ireland conference to launch this front

Noonan Rolls Back X Case Gains

THE ABORTION INFORMATION BILL does not liberalise the law on information other than to confirm what others have always done—that is, to supply addresses and phone numbers of abortion clinics. In almost every other respect it is a draconian piece of legislation.

It makes an entirely spurious distinction between information and referral. Few pregnant women want to or should have to make the telephone appointment for their termination. This can be a terrifying prospect at times of such vulnerability, especially for the economically disadvantaged and the socially deprived.

The proposed bill also prohibits the display of "unsolicited" abortion information, in public notices etc. This would mean, for example, that it would be illegal for student handbooks to carry the information. More worrying still, the bill introduces into law a liability for criminal charges for those found in contravention of its provisions. It also regulates the imposition of fines. It gives the police increased search and seizure powers.

There is a least one other respect in which the bill's provisions are unprecedented. It intrudes into the doctor or counsellor/client relationship in such a way as to make entrapment by anti-abortion forces a likely consequence. Therefore, it lays the basis for criminalising medical professionals and others who overstep its artificial limits.

This sanction could be extended also to broadcasters or publications editors who may be deemed to have, inadvertently or otherwise, provided information which assists a woman to obtain an abortion abroad. Yet the very same sanction would not apply to parents or confidants who deliberately chose to do exactly the same thing.

This aspect of the bill has antagonised some elements of the medical community. But the sting has been taken out of the tail by the reactionary governmental concession of a conscience clause for GPs. ■

THE PASSAGE OF an Abortion Information Bill through the Dail and Seanad is an important landmark for Irish women. Unfortunately this is a case of one step forward—two steps back.

The approval of the Bill in its initial stages undoubtedly represents a marked rebuff to the catholic hierarchy by catholic legislators who were directly accused of 'aiding and abetting' abortion. But the provisions of the Bill are so woefully limited that it effectively restricts out of existence the right of any meaningful access to abortion information.

Yet since the electorate voted in a referendum in 1992 in favour of the provision of abortion information there were no restrictions whatsoever on its provision. The effect of this Bill is to circumscribe that liberty in the most thorough-going fashion.

Recent developments show that Fianna Fáil is still unquestionably the party of catholic nationalism. It is no surprise to see its members baulking, under the hammer blows of the "pro-life" lobby, at measures as elementary as the provision of abortion information. But that they did so with so much wringing of hands and public agonising over the issue reflects inner party uncertainty over the direction that should be taken by the newly purged party in the aftermath of the recent governmental crisis.

Fianna Fail Hopelessly Split

This is evidenced by the diverse positions taken by Fianna Fáil deputies in the debate. Quite simply the party was hopelessly split on the issue. David Andrews argued that the Bill was a minimum necessary measure to cater for the needs of Irish women and Noel Aherne wanted another referendum to roll back the 1992 Supreme Court ruling.

The gradual erosion of Fianna Fáil's electoral support combined with the shock delivered to its system by the undignified manner of its exit from power means that its top priority now is to overcome its divisions and rebuild. Part of that agenda involves relating to the more socially liberal electorate in the towns which has deserted Fianna Fáil in recent elections.

In the past this has explained Fianna Fáil support for the decriminalisation of homosexuality—albeit begrudging support imposed at the behest of European court rulings. In the future, this will dictate its acquiescence and unenthusiastic support for a divorce referendum.

But a limit has been set on the march towards liberalisation and abortion provision (or steps towards it) is where the line is being drawn. Crossing this line threatens to drive a wedge between the party and the catholic hierarchy and more significantly, to loose its support among the most reactionary rural elements upon which the party machine traditionally depends. The failure to vote against the Bill at its second stage was a cynical reflection of this uncertainty—as was the ludicrous spectacle of Bertie Aherne leading from behind in the name of democratic consultation with his party colleagues.

But equally Fine Gael, whose preference has previously been to lie low on this debate, has revealed that its so-called liberal wing are unable to see off the equally catholic confessional tradition of that organisation. Alan Shatter was alone in Fine Gael in suggesting that “We would be better off ending all the jurisprudential gymnastics and reverting to the pre-1983 constitutional position”.

This is the sensible opinion of a lawyer appalled by future prospects of gruelling court battles attempting to deal with the legal quagmire into which the debate on abortion has sunk. It is not the view of someone who wishes to confront the reality of poverty-stricken and panicked pregnant Irish women. The removal of the 1983 Eighth amendment to the Constitution would leave intact the state ban on abortion (imposed by the 1861 Protection of the Person & Property Act)—an Act that would subject any one “aiding or abetting” unlawful abortion to sentences including penal servitude for life! This would also be a recipe for holding another referendum, which none of his colleagues have a stomach for.

Labour Hops to Fine Gael Tune

Meanwhile Labour has gladly hopped to the tune of the Fine Gael fiddlers in agreeing to a Bill on the most minimalist basis, which in itself, is merely a recipe for continuing to export the abortion problem. Similarly, they have ditched the commitment they gave in their previous programme for government with Fianna Fáil to legislate for the so-called substantive issue of abortion provision in this state.

Labour has forced the pace in the cowardice stakes—rowing in Democratic Left behind them. This was quite a coup given that De Rossa previously supported liberally available abortion information and referral facilities and even went so far as to publicly state his support for therapeutic abortion within this state. But, ultimately, Democratic Left’s greed for power was greater than its appetite for the liberal agenda which its so pushed in opposition. De Rossa delivered up an “acceptable compromise”, acceptable to him and his cronies, that is.

Some Progressive Democrats decided to take a stand on the issue. Mary Harney declared that her vote in favour of the bill was a “symbolic” one intended to dissociate her from the “reactionary” forces of the pro-life lobby. McDowell pointed out the more ridiculous contradictory elements

in the bill. (e.g. the potentially ludicrous scenario whereby women who are currently entitled to an abortion within the state would not be entitled to be referred for such an abortion under the legislation). Liz O’Donnell made emotional speeches raising this and related issues.

While engaging in a clever battle of legal point-scoring the Progressive Democrats are mindful most of all of the necessity to carve themselves out a unique constituency (liberal on social issues and conservative on economic ones)—a necessity for those to wish to protect their increasingly marginalised seats. None of them had the courage of their convictions to go beyond their rhetorical flourishes or to table any significant amendments to the Bill.

The PDs were merely espousing views that enjoy common support according to the latest opinion polls which show that 64% of those surveyed would support abortion provision under certain circumstances. This figure included a 10% minority who would agree with the introduction of abortion on demand. (*Sunday Press*, February 26, 1995). In this context the stand of the Progressive Democrats can be seen as more pragmatic than courageous.

Anti-choice protester outside the Dáil displays desired role model for Irish women.



By grasping the nettle of legislative reform the Irish state has one main purpose. It intends to enshrine the basic anti-abortion position against further pressure for change

By grasping the nettle of legislative reform the Irish state has one main purpose. It intends to enshrine the basic anti-abortion position against further pressure for change. It is not difficult to face down the lunatic fringe groups that jostled for press attention outside the Dail—one of whose placards read “Government Abortion Information — Ring 666 and ask for Nick” and whose key tactic was to supply politicians with medals of Our Lady of Guadalupe accompanied by a printed prayer.

Labour’s Eithne Fitzgerald could afford to muse about “mullahs of the pro-Life movement” in the certain knowledge that these groups represent none but their own tiny numbers and even the ‘blue shirts’ could be heard muttering about “shades of Ceaucescu’s Romania and Khomeini’s Iran”. But it is quite another matter to deal with the realities behind the freaks side-show.

Secumbing to Clericalist Reaction

The barrage of letters, phone calls, intimation and abuse which ensued over even the mildest proposals in the proposed Information Bill have served as a timely reminder to the politicians, if one were needed, to steer clear of the substantive issue. When the X case exploded, Labour chief whip, Brendan Howlin called for “immediate” legislation to regulate abortion provision. Now you wouldn’t see his heels for dust on the same issue. This fact alone speaks volumes about the hypocrisy and cowardice of his party.

The 1992 the Supreme Court ruling in the X-Case made abortion legal in Ireland. Incredibly, the judiciary even attacked the politicians for failing to deal with the matter. They were referring to the responsibility for legislating on the 1983 Constitutional amendment on abortion, the jewel-in-the-crown of the pro-life lobby, a truly peculiar twist of fate that they could never have anticipated.

This logic has not been lost on the die-hard elements of religious right-wing groups around Des Hanafin. They have busied themselves in recent times with intensive lobbying campaigns seeking to reverse the effects of the Supreme Court ruling and further, to hold a referendum to roll back the tide—an ambitious schedule for those who were dealt such a devastating blow by the events of 1992!

Although they have been forced to disassociate themselves from the openly thuggish tactics of the Youth Defense mob, their systematic rounds of lobbying have won them important victories in local county councils.

Their brazen demands for a new referendum continue to fall on deaf ears. Such a referendum would have the advantage of pleasing the pro-life lobby while getting the legislators off the hook of dealing with such a thorny issue now.

At the very least it would allow them to pose the issue in a less ambiguous manner and at safe distance from the emotional climate of 1992. But the prospects of the country being torn by the divisions that would ensue in

The proposal to legislate on the substantive issue has the same amount of attraction for Irish political parties as the cross has for the vampire. They will not touch it for fear that the ensuing controversies would tear their parties asunder.

OPPOSE STATUTORY RESTRICTIONS

THE 1992 REFERENDUM VOTE on the substantive issue (12th amendment) was not so clear cut. There was a government attempt at the time to exclude the suicide threat as grounds for abortion and to distinguish between the health, as distinct from the life, of the mother.

The wording of the proposed 12th amendment was “It shall be unlawful to terminate the life of an unborn unless such terminations necessary to save the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother where there is an illness or disorder of the mother giving rise to a real and substantial risk to her life, not being a risk of self destruction”. This was defeated by 65%.

But, the result itself is ambiguous because opponents of the amendment included those who thought it conceded too much (SPUC etc) and those who thought it did not concede enough. Similarly ranged on the ‘Yes’ side were those who supported it because they felt it was the best that was likely to be got in terms of a liberal approach and those who supported it because it was the minimum concession that would safeguard the core of the conservative position.

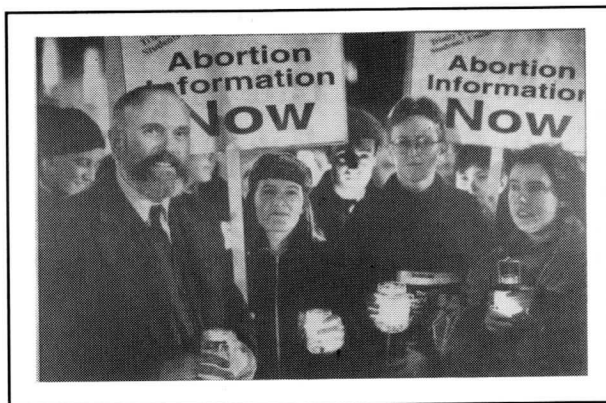
Notwithstanding the mixed motivations of those who opposed the 12th amendment, the implications that flow from its rejection are abundantly clear. The government’s explanatory booklet which was sent to every

such a pre-referendum run-up vastly outweigh any advantages which this might have—notwithstanding the weakened position of a catholic church suffering disgrace and scandal at every hands turn.

However, even if abortion were only to be permitted in the strictly limited scenarios envisaged by the Supreme Court (i.e. a substantial risk to the woman's life, including the threat of suicide) or in any other 'exceptional' circumstances (rape, incest, congenital disease), then this concedes that there is in fact a difference between the "rights" of the foetus and those of the mother.

Once this distinction is made the floodgates will inevitably open. Ultimately the whole question of abortion becomes not one of "murder" or "life" but of who decides when a woman can exercise the choice not to continue with a pregnancy.

At a practical level this means deciding who performs abortion, up to what term, in what circumstances etc. This is why the proposal to legislate on the substantive issue has the same amount of attraction for Irish political



parties as the cross has for the vampire. They will not touch it for fear that the ensuing controversies would tear their parties asunder. They would rather risk the explosion of another X case than turn their face to this task.■

home at the time of the referendum stated that a rejection of the amendment would be followed by the implementation of legislation for abortion provision in the state.

Revolutionaries especially must state what is necessary and must seek to win others to the arguments around abortion on demand, however reluctant some activists may yet be to take it up. Anything less will strengthen the slightly modified but fundamentally anti-abortion position of Irish liberalism which finds it more politic to export the issue to Britain than to confront clericalist reaction.

The IWG always argued against the business of calling for statutory restrictions on the right for legislation in the aftermath of the defeat of the proposed 12th amendment or legislative demands that would have the effect of restricting these rights.

The Supreme Court has opened up, under mass pressure, the possibility of some form of abortion rights. The central problem of the Church and State, far more significant... is how best to restrict out of existence this perilous concession. If we, as the self-styled 'pro choice' movement do not have a clear position on opposing all restrictions which the state will try to impose on women's decisions about their own lives, then in no sense can we claim to stand for choice.

We argued to:

... resist every attempt to restrict or impose any conditions, by law, on the implementation of the Supreme Court ruling which makes abortion legal where there is a threat to the life of the mother. We must make the arguments against giving the medical or other professions any veto over the decision of the mother as to threat to her life.

Whatever critical support, as against the anti-abortion forces, the published terms of such legal measures might merit, we emphasis that the key task remains repeal of the Eighth amendment. (IWG leaflet 10 May 1992.)

We stand over those positions today.

Militants have to address the realities faced by Irish women. This were starkly revealed once again in the very week the Bill came before the legislature. A twelve year old school girl was found to be pregnant and a dead baby was found in a bucket of water while its distraught teenage mother was hauled in for questioning. Oireachtas envelopes were used to peddle poisonous twaddle such as "have the raped children adopted".

We must take the issue of abortion into the working class and building organised support for unrestricted abortion rights, especially amongst women workers. This means taking the issue up in union forums. It means organising public meetings in local communities, as resources become available. Crucially it means relating to youth, at their rallies, raves, festivals etc.

It means tapping into the sympathies of the thousands of Irish women who have had abortions in the last fifty years. This is not something that is posed for the indefinite future. It is something that is posed now!

The Abortion Information Bill has been sent to the Supreme Court for adjudication of its constitutionality. In the event of the Bill being found to be constitutional we fight to:

- Defy all restrictions on abortion information provision
- Repeal of the Eighth Amendment
- Repeal of sections 58 & 59 of the 1861 Act
- For free, safe and legal abortion on demand

Why we fight for Abortion on Demand

MORE IRISH WOMEN than ever are having abortions in Britain each year. This is a matter of fact. Why should they have to travel abroad faced with the misery of an unwanted pregnancy? What about those women who cannot afford to go? And why should those women who do get away be forced to go in shame and secrecy? Why be denied adequate counselling and after-care on their return? For the simple reason that their appalling plight is very low down on the agenda of the Irish ruling class.

If the government were to legislate tomorrow to implement the controversial Supreme Court ruling permitting abortion, it would matter not a jot to the 99% of women who travel to Britain for abortions each year.

This is because abortion provision is being proposed only in the most highly restricted of circumstances, where there is a substantial threat to the mother's life. Let's face facts. The vast majority of women who are forced to seek abortions abroad do so for reasons other than this.

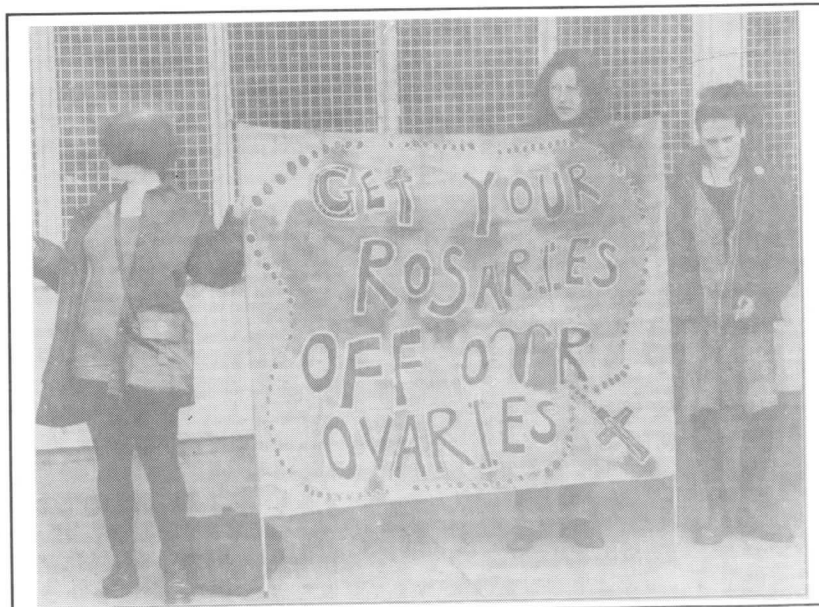
They do so because of contraceptive failures, for reasons of lack of knowledge or availability of contraception, because pregnancy threatens to lead to loss of work or student status, because it generally increases poverty and dependence, or maybe simply because they do not want to have children.

Marxists argue that human beings are distinct from other forms of life, including the human foetus,

because we are bound together in a set of social relations. Through this social network we strive to self-consciously fashion our surroundings and transform nature for our own purposes.

A foetus is a potential human being. It cannot be said to share those features of the human condition until it ceases to be part of the mother's body and becomes an independent social being. At that point, its development comes to depend not upon its mother, but upon the wider social relations which exist. A conflict of rights exists between the foetus and the woman in whose body it resides. Neither science nor religious dogma can decide on the question of rights. Only society can do that.

Pro-choice demonstrators get the message across.



And society cannot guarantee any rights to the foetus until it is born, until such point as it becomes a separate entity, and enters a set of social relations. Prior to this it is not feasible for society to intervene and grant rights. Prior to that the foetus is entirely dependent on the mother, not only for its blood supply, but in terms of its potential for birth.

Nobody can make women have children they don't wish to bear. Measures designed to force them to do so cannot be systematically implemented by society from a practical point of view. This issue was illustrated very dramatically by the X case victim who threatened to commit suicide rather than carry her pregnancy to full term.

The distinction between the potential humanity of the foetus and the full humanity of a person is recognised universally by Church and State. That is why governments issue certificates confirming the date of birth and not the date of conception. When a miscarriage occurs, neither the legal nor the medical profession considers that a death has occurred. Consequently no death certificate is issued.

The people who style themselves 'pro-life' wish to deny women

any right to control their own fertility, whatever the effects it may have on the woman's sanity or physical health, not to mention *her* right to life.

They know that to legitimise abortion in exceptional circumstances is to contradict the anti-abortionists' fundamental argument: that abortion is murder because life begins when the "soul" enters the fertilised egg at conception. For them the sanctity of that life, based on this "soul" is paramount, and the wishes, or even the health, not to mention the life, of the mother is entirely secondary.

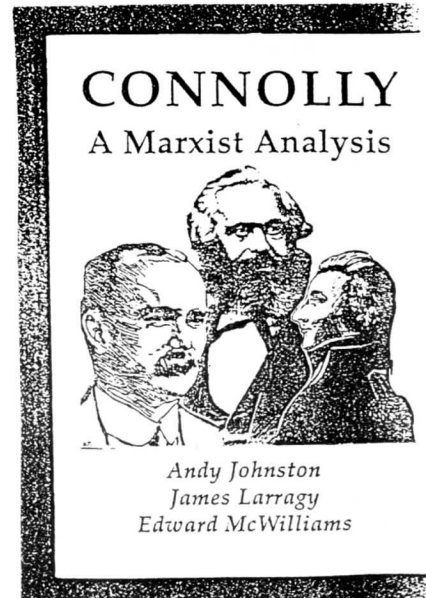
We say that if a woman does not want to be pregnant, then she alone must have the right to decide to end the pregnancy. Only the woman herself can really determine the likely impact of continuing a pregnancy on her life, and therefore it must be her decision, not that of the courts or the doctors, nor the church.

Least of all should we let the state take this vital issue of women's control of their fertility out of their hands. Any other course means accepting that the state can compel a woman to carry through a pregnancy or criminalize her for attempting to end it.

Not only must the state be obliged to legally recognise the right of a woman to unconditionally exercise her right to choice; it must be compelled to provide all the necessary facilities for the health and welfare of the woman in the exercise of that choice.

That means free, safe and legal abortion on demand. Otherwise it would remain a right only for those with sufficient money to buy it.

In the last analysis, revolutionaries know that the state which presides over the oppression of women will always resist attempts by women to exercise their rights to control their own bodies, their own lives. That is why women, alongside men, must fight to smash the capitalist state in the general interest of the emancipation of all. ■



James Connolly: A Marxist Analysis
Price: £5.00 (inc. p&p)



Get **FIGHTBACK**, the youth bulletin of the IWG.
Price: 10p

Also available:
The Socialist Workers Movement: A Trotskyist Analysis, Price: £2.00 (inc. p&p)
Trotskyist International Issue 16
English language journal of the LRCI
Price £2.00 (inc. p&p)

Defending the Truth about October

ANARCHISM IS DEFINED by its opposition to the state. By opposing the whole idea of the state in case it goes wrong, anarchists are rejecting something which is essential if workers are to have a chance of beating the bosses and building a classless socialist society. This is like a football team refusing to kick the ball. That way you are guaranteed against scoring an own goal—but you stand no chance of winning the match.

In *Class Struggle* no. 22 we published a feature on the 1917 October Revolution entitled 'Re-viewing 1917: the Revolution Defended'. The Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) replied to this in a privately circulated statement paper called 'Defending the Bolsheviks defending October or defending the truth?'

Their response, in summary, is that the Bolsheviks were responsible for a systematic destruction of workers democracy and that their actions reflect accurately the general nature of Bolshevism as an anti-workers-democracy viewpoint.

This is our reply. Photocopies of both articles are available on request.

THE WORKERS SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT (WSM) have responded to the defence of the October 1917 revolution in Russia contained in *Class Struggle* No. 22. Their view of the Russian Revolution highlights the deep-seated differences between the Anarchist and Bolshevik views of revolution.

Their response, in summary, is that the Bolsheviks were responsible for a systematic destruction of workers democracy and that these actions of theirs in the Russian Revolution reflect accurately the general nature of Bolshevism as an anti-workers-democracy viewpoint.

If this charge against Bolshevism is that it undervalues workers democracy, then the converse danger with anarchism has always been that, because of anarchism's fear of any exercise of authority, its main political purpose becomes to discredit and undermine the most advanced sections of the working class whenever they seek to lead their class into effective struggle against capitalism.

So those anarchists inclined to attack Bolshevism, portray the history of the Russian Revolution as the history of a centralised party riding roughshod over the rights and interests of workers and so destroying the very revolution which put them in power. To those suspicious of anarchism the Spanish Revolution (1936)—the revolution in which anarchism had the best opportunity to reveal its nature in its actions—was a tragedy caused by characteristic ineptitude, indecision, ill-discipline and, paradoxically, collaboration with Stalinism by the Spanish anarchists.

Judging Revolutions

In each case there is a revolution which went down to bloody defeat. But the differences are significant. The Russian revolution, under Bolshevik leadership and against all the odds, defeated its opponent in what remains the most extraordinary displays of working class military self-organisation and efficiency in human history.

But having won the war, exhausted, the remnants of the revolutionary Russian working class lost the peace—insofar as the revolution was hijacked by the Stalinist counter-revolution. By contrast, against significantly more favourable odds in the wake of a bungled right wing coup

attempt, the Spanish Revolution grasped defeat from the jaws of victory.

It would be too easy to say that history judged both the Spanish anarchists and the Russian Bolsheviks; that defeat proved their critics were right in each case. Revolutions should not be judged so casually. The point is whether the mistakes made by the revolutionary leadership were decisive in facilitating the victory of the counter-revolutionary forces in Russia (or Spain) and whether those errors which occurred flowed from the general perspective of the revolutionary leadership or were the result of regrettable, but politically less consequential failures of individuals and of tactics.

So, in the debate between anarchism and Bolshevism about the Russian revolution, what is needed is an answer along such lines to the general question in response to which anarchists condemn Bolshevism: 'does setting up a disciplined state machine to defeat counter-revolution, in the immediate aftermath of political revolution, doom the revolution to degeneration?' Is it necessary, from day one of any revolutionary process to set up a decentralised society, or is it possible for a centralised revolutionary workers state to organise, at first, on whatever basis necessary to defeat its counter-revolutionary opponents and then go on to ever-increasingly democratise itself until the state itself withers away?

Radically Contrasting Approaches

The former idea is surely at the heart of anarchism: that the state always and inevitably disenfranchises and disempowers the individual and the locality. In line with this belief, Emma Goldman and other anarchists, followed now by the WSM, have always argued that the Bolshevik approach of the leaders of the Russian revolution—which involved centralising power—doomed the revolution from

Does setting up a disciplined state machine to defeat the counter-revolution, in the immediate aftermath of the political revolution, doom the revolution to degeneration? Is it necessary from day one of the revolutionary process to set up a decentralised society?



its earliest days, irrespective of the good purpose (the defeat of the Whites) for which the power was used.

The alternative Bolshevik view, that the working class is in principle capable of organising and reorganising its state, depending on the immediate needs of the working class, is at the heart of Bolshevism. It is explained in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*.

This difference between the anarchist and Bolshevik views certainly leads to radically contrasting approaches to revolutionary situations. The implication of the classic anarchist position espoused by the WSM is that every popular uprising must at best immediately dismantle or at worst just try to ignore centralised state power and set up only independent local democratic units, operating their own factories in their own interest, having their own militias and interacting with others on an independent basis.

Such anarchists recognise no enforceable obligation on individual soviets to act in accordance with the general interests of the class, unless that individual soviet agrees with it. This perspective is clearly reflected in the WSM's core charge that the Bolsheviks had no right to force errant local soviets into line in order to facilitate military victory against counter-revolution.

To support this view anarchists point to the benefits of direct workers control in increasing economic efficiency. The core of truth in this view has long been recognised by Bolsheviks, who have always emphasised

the need to maximise the direct control by workers over the economy, with the rigorous subordination of technocrats and administrators. The lack of any conflict in principle between the anarchist and Bolshevik views on that general principle of economic organisation is well reflected in Lenin's expressed desire to propose setting aside a part of the USSR in which the most radical ideas suggested by anarchists could be applied, in order to see if those ideas could work in the economic conditions of the USSR.

What is at issue in a debate on the Russian Revolution between anarchists and Bolsheviks is a different point. It is the two-fold question of whether in the face of a severe military threat of counter-revolution, it is legitimate—because necessary in order to win a civil war—to adopt methods of organisation different from those one wishes to see adopted in the economy after the war and whether in the Russian Civil War in particular, centralised forms of organisation, quite unlike the forms of subsequent economic and social organisation both anarchists and Bolsheviks would have wished to see, were necessary in order to win the war.

The real danger with the anarchist view is that by sticking rigorously to its fear of state authority, it ends up denying that the working class, when faced with a resurgent bourgeoisie, can or should organise itself on a national or wider basis in a class struggle to do whatever is necessary to decisively smash the state power of the bourgeoisie and open the road to the building of a socialist society. In summary, this kind of anarchism appears to have no answer to organised, nationwide bourgeois violence.

Before condemning such a view out of hand it is important to allow that such a pessimistic anarchist position may be correct. The possibility should not be ruled out. After a century of defeated workers uprisings, dating back to the Paris Commune, no one can afford to be complacent.

Maybe it is not possible for the working class having risen up, to go on to organise itself in a way which allows it to hold state power against all attempts at counter-revolution and then use that state power to enrich and empower the mass of people.

Maybe the means of organised revolution do destroy the desired end of socialism. Maybe. Were such a view true it would indeed be strange. All warfare requires special forms of organisation. These are invariably not models for the kind of social organisation that ruling classes would generally wish to see.

Each ruling class in each epoch of history has tended so far to be capable of setting up the exceptional forms of organisation required to carry out war, and has then also proven capable of dismantling them.

Even in the case of modern all-out mechanised

Attacks on Leninism

THE WSM CHOOSES to attack what it calls 'Leninism' and the standard trick of right wing propagandists of taking events of the 1917-21 period out of context to suggest that these show us the true nature of 'Bolshevism'.

The central purpose of the WSM in their response to *Class Struggle* seems to have been to use the Russian Revolution to condemn the idea of an organised leadership for the working class, as represented in the case of the Russian Revolution by Bolshevism.

This method reflects even less credit on the WSM because its logic turns out to be so flimsy. To say that the actions of the Civil War reveal the essence of Bolshevik politics is like saying that the point of view of the British bourgeoisie is revealed by the planned economy they temporarily established during World War 2. It is absurd.

The Bolsheviks acted in extremely adverse conditions during the 1917-21 period in ways they themselves considered merely the lesser of evils.

But WSM insist, on the basis of reference to the events of the 1917-21 period, that Bolsheviks believe that the working class must be led from without by a small group of intellectuals. Where is the evidence for this view of the role of the party in the writings of Bolshevism?

The key document of the Bolshevik tradition in this regard is *What is to be Done?* Certainly Lenin recognised there that the revolutionary party begins with small groups of intellectuals.

But this is no more than a sociological observation about the origin of all revolutionary movements which typically begin as small groups organised around distinct ideas and proposals for challenging the old order.

Politically, Bolshevism is clear that the party must become possessed by the class, must become an integral part of the class—in fact it must recruit from the decisive sectors of the class if there is to be any hope of revolutionary success. WSM even quote from the *Class Struggle* article they are responding to, various claims that the Bolshevik party had achieved this.

Yet WSM ignores *Class Struggle's* insistence on that very point when it comes to telling us what it wants us to believe the general Bolshevik position is.

This illustrates that throughout their polemic, WSM prefers to trot out caricatures of Bolshevism worthy only of right wing propaganda. Why this preference for misrepresentation?

industrial warfare, the bourgeoisie has been able to abandon all its free market social norms for periods of warfare and then return to the substance of laissez faire capitalism, without hesitation, once the war was over.

Yet the Workers Solidarity Movement seems to suggest that the working class cannot do this, that if it once goes down the path of disciplined social organisation to defeat its class enemies, it will be unable to reverse that process.

The argument amounts to the view that the working class, uniquely of all ruling classes, is congenitally incapable of consciously determining its own destiny, that it is unable to set up, alter and dismantle state-forms to suit the tasks of the different periods of its history.

That traditional anarchist view is at best an unlikely thesis. The WSM fail to provide and *Class Struggle* does not believe there is any sustainable argument for that view. If it is the view of the WSM, it tells us more about them and their mistrust of the working class than it does about the revolutionary capacity of the working class itself.

The implication of this kind of argument is that its proponents support the political cause of the working class only within strict limits.

There is this danger right through anarchism—that beyond a certain point it prefers the individual liberties of a continued capitalism to the discipline a workers state can be forced to adopt by the counter-offensives of reaction.

Polemic on 1917

That question of the purpose of the WSM in misrepresenting the record of Bolshevism will not go away easily. The misrepresentation of Bolshevism verges on the comical when it comes to dealing with October 1917. The WSM spend some paragraphs arguing, supposedly against the Bolshevik view, that the October seizure of power was not an independent act of the Bolshevik party, but a consequence of a process of the seizure of elements of state power by the working class over a period of many months.

The point hardly proves a telling one against Bolshevism since that interpretation of the October seizure of power is actually the Bolshevik interpretation! Trotsky's whole purpose in his *History of the Russian Revolution* was to show that the October seizure of power was an extension of the previous revolutionary process and not a Blanqui-like attempt at a coup by a minority.

There is, nevertheless, one important difference between the WSM interpretation of October 1917 and the Bolshevik one. Following Maurice Brinton, WSM suggest that because workers had spontaneously set up factory committees before October, that nothing of substance was at stake by October. Let us leave aside the fact that WSM argue as if they believed that the existence of a factory

To say that the actions of the Civil War reveal the essence of Bolshevik politics is like saying that the point of view of the British bourgeoisie is revealed by the planned economy they temporarily established during World War 2. It is absurd.

committee implied direct workers management of the factory, which it did not since many of these committees co-existed with the continued active management by the capitalist owners of the factory. Let us focus instead on the core point, which is this: although October was only part of a larger revolutionary process, we recognise that it was a crucial one. WSM, by contrast, seem unable to see what was at stake in October 1917.

What was at stake in October 1917 firstly, was to block a tide of reaction then building up and being facilitated at the time by the Provisional Government of Kerensky. Not long after, in Finland, in Germany, in Hungary and in the areas controlled by the Whites in the Civil War, evidence can be found of the kind of reactionary mass terror which would have been imposed on Petrograd and Moscow if the reaction had not been stopped by seizing state power.

As the workers of the Vyborg and other areas of Petrograd realised only too clearly, there was no sign of the dispersed factory committees being in a position to stop reaction decisively. For that reason, with their lives at stake, they poured into the Bolshevik party and transformed it into a party of immediate political revolution, against the instincts of many of its established leaders, with the exception of Lenin.

WSM seems not to notice also that the First World War was continuing. Seizure of state power was the only way to fulfil the urgent demand of the people to get Russia out of the war. Decentralised worker-controlled factories could only refuse to supply the front, thus condemning fellow workers to death and opening the road to a German takeover of Petrograd. They were understandably reluctant to do that.

So the Provisional Government had been able to continue the slaughter at the front. State power was necessary to solve this problem in a way which protected the working class and what had been achieved in February 1917 and since. The October revolution achieved that by opening the road to the negotiation of a peace with Germany which could not have been achieved otherwise. It should be noted that many anarchists in Russia opposed the

negotiation of the Brest Litovsk Treaty which ended the war (albeit on the basis of unavoidable concessions to German imperialism) and with it three years of unremitting butchery. They did so even though they had no alternative schema to the continuation of the war.

Thirdly, food supplies were collapsing. Once again, neither the seizure of factories nor the seizure of the land by peasants on their own could solve this problem. State power was needed to organise supplies. Life, peace, food, these are mundane realities compared with the principles of 'workers democracy', but they justify state power being sought, in the eyes of any person who can reasonably claim to desire the best interests of the working class. Why do such matters prove of so little concern to WSM that they hardly warrant a mention?

On Revolutionary War

Those polemics by the WSM on 'Bolshevism' and October 1917 suggest an antagonism on their part to any form of efficient co-ordination of the resources of the working class to fight reaction. But the position is not clear cut. WSM have at least tried to suggest that decentralised organisation can be efficient. This indicates that WSM accept, at least in principle, that it was justified to defend the Russian Revolution and suggests that their real objection is that Bolshevism defended it inefficiently.

It would be desirable to be able to draw the conclusion unequivocally that this is what concerns the WSM. It would also be useful to debate the errors which did occur during the Russian revolution with committed supporters of the Russian revolution who happen to be particularly focused on the question of 'workers democracy'.

But WSM make no attempt to explain how the defence of the soviets did not *require* the construction and supply of the Red Army. They do not explain how an Army of the Revolution could have been organised in Russian conditions in the 1917-21 period without the forcible requisitioning of food, the taking and execution of hostages, the imprisonment of those who spread mis-information, the censorship of those publication which deliberate sought to subvert the new workers state, the disciplining of dissident factories.

It is the view of *Class Struggle* that the actions of the soviet republic under Bolshevik leadership in the civil war are generally defensible as having been necessary to stabilise the revolution. Errors of judgement occurred. Things were done by Bolsheviks which were counter-productive. Things were done by the 'anarchist' Makhno which helped defeat the Whites. But as a general statement, what was done under Bolshevik leadership was necessary for the victory and advance of the workers and peasants and therefore justified. This is what was argued in the previous

Class Struggle and has, apparently, been rejected by the WSM.

What we believe WSM cannot prove—because it is clearly wrong—is that the Russian Revolution could have survived without the Red Army and so without the bulk of the organised, disciplined system set up by the Bolsheviks. If this is true as a harsh fact and the WSM nevertheless adhere to their condemnation of the general course of action of the Bolsheviks, the consequence is that WSM appear to be arguing, by unavoidable implication, that the Bolsheviks should have refused the mandate of the Russian working class to organise their defence against reaction and instead should have stood aside for white reaction and the massacre of their own people.

That it is nevertheless not reasonable to ascribe this reactionary position unequivocally to the WSM reflects the ambiguity at the heart of anarchist politics in relation to the working class, an ambiguity apparently repeated in the WSM. They have chosen to expand at length on arguments which replicate the attacks on the very idea of organised workers revolution promoted by right wing propagandists and have chosen to expand not at all on potential arguments about how best to defend the working class against reaction.

We are left with the prospect that WSM's position is unlike that of Victor Serge, for example, who argued that the crucial error was the December 1918 decision to set up the Cheka, rather than workers tribunals. WSM's position also appears radically different from the Workers Opposition who argued, among other points, that a crucial error was allowing privileges to members of the bureaucracy. WSM's position appears to have little in common with those who argued that the crucial error was the suppression of faction rights in 1921, or the military response to the Kronstadt uprising, or the suppression, with Trotsky's connivance, of Lenin's testament.

People may argue all these positions and aim to show that such and such an act was counterproductive to the overall defence and development of the workers state. But WSM, by accident or design, argue a far less reasonable or acceptable position: that the very revolutionary discipline on the basis of which the Red Army was built and the civil war was won is wrong.

The Decisive Point

The crucial point of importance for justifying a rejection of WSM's demonisation of the Bolsheviks is what the Bolsheviks did themselves after the Civil War, once the position had stabilised. Did they try to use the state to move forward, as *State and Revolution* argues they should, or did they use the state just to systematically consolidate their own power as anarchism suggests they must?

There was certainly a period in 1921-22 when Lenin and the Bolsheviks hesitated. But this cannot be decisive for answering the question. The answer is clear, taking the 1921-27 period as a whole and despite the many tactical errors: the Bolsheviks opened a battle against the bureaucracy of the state. That battle, initiated by Lenin, taken up by Trotsky after a potentially fatal further hesitation, ultimately failed. It was not predetermined to fail.

The economic policies of the NEP were practical, and although they contained important concessions to capitalism, these were judged to be unavoidable for preserving the loyalty of the peasants and workers for the new state. The NEP was combined by Lenin and Trotsky with advocacy of a centralised plan for industrialisation on the basis of progressive taxation of rich sectors with the aim of rejuvenating the proletarian ones. This was a plan which the Stalinists took only belatedly, in 1928, and even then on the basis of pretending that these ideas were theirs.

The political programme of democratisation which was also proposed at the time would have decisively weakened the bureaucracy and at least opened up the possibility of the healthy survival of the first workers state in history.

In other words there was a way—laid out by the Bolsheviks at the time—to build on the victory in the Civil War and consolidate real working class power. It was only when and because these policies were conclusively defeated by the bureaucracy that the USSR was set firmly on the road to degeneration.

Class Struggle believes that the proper place for those concerned with workers democracy is in the ranks of those fighting to build a revolutionary party on the model of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution. The commitment of Bolshevism to workers democracy is categorical and Bolsheviks yield to no one on this point.

If the Bolshevik tradition has proven to have weaknesses in practise in accumulating the experience of how to protect and develop workers democracy, then this has been primarily because of the conditions in which it has gained its main experience of developing in working class movements.

It is also partly the fault of those who have stood aside from the building of this movement and preferred to try to take the question of democracy out of the context of the overall interests of the working class and fetishise it into a complete political programme on its own. This is the error of even the best anarchists.

Workers Democracy

This error of taking the question of democracy out of the context of the overall interests of the working class, leads to the political ambiguity we see in the WSM in relation to the Russian Revolution. The absence of a clear class perspective of *absolute* loyalty to the working class—which is characteristic of the traditional anarchist polemic against Bolshevism, is now repeated by the WSM.

Anarchism has another absolute to which this is subordinated—the *absolute* value of the freedom of the individual—a core belief of revolutionary bourgeois ideology.

It leads not to an improvement of the revolutionary movement, but to abstention by anarchists from key political struggles and even to attacks by anarchists on essential elements of a revolutionary working class stance. Those are the facts about the anarchist critique of the Russian revolution which members and sympathisers of the WSM need to face, particularly because they have themselves replicated those errors in this article on the Russian revolution. ■



Red Guards at the Bolshevik Headquarters in 1917.

BOOK REVIEW

Revisionism in Irish History

THIS VOLUME PRESENTS the major statements of position on the controversy over 'revisionism' which became identified with the anti-republican propaganda campaign in Ireland after 1968.

Revisionism attempted not only demythologise but to destroy Irish nationalist history-writing or historiography. Historical materialists take clear sides against those who would portray British imperialism in Ireland as a myth, but this does not mean that nationalist myth has to be indulged.

In 1936, leading Irish historians set an agenda for the study of Irish history on a scientific basis, in terms of research methods, source materials, and the systematic revision of unquestioned assumptions. They specifically set out to challenge received nationalist myth. Nationalist history was the dominant element of official state ideology throughout the school system in the south since independence. Revising Irish history in the course of new rigorous study became the ideological preoccupation of the new generation of historians right through to the 1970s.

Revisionism burst upon the political scene in reaction to the rebirth of Republican militancy in the north after 1968. New history writing was quoted against nationalist traditions. There were many political factors which encouraged this attempt to create a new ideology, such as economic development in the early sixties, the meeting of Premiers from North and South, the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement, etc. All this encouraged a rejection of republican nationalism as archaic.

Revisionism became controversial after an attack on Patrick Pearse, written for the 1966 commemoration of the Easter Rising but suppressed at the time, was published in 1972. In *The Canon of Irish History* the Jesuit Fr. Shaw attacked Pearse for his falsification

Interpreting Irish History: the debate on historical revisionism.
edited by Ciaran Brady,
Irish Academic Press, 1994.

of Irish history and his support for the physical force tradition of the I.R.B. Around the same time Conor Cruise O'Brien intervened as a Coalition (Labour) government minister to impose censorship on Republicans. He polemicised against the nationalist character of history, in so far as it had an anti-imperialist content, in the entire school system.

History as Propaganda

It is clear from this book that the leading and most conscious revisionists have been Ronan Fanning and Roy Foster. Both have a consciously revisionist general interpretation of Ireland's past. In Foster's article in the book he sketches the origins of Irish history writing to show how by 1770 there was already a popular romantic nationalist symbolism upon which the growing nationalist political movement built. He focuses on the importance of history as propaganda. Foster attacks not just the 'myths' of popular historical consciousness but sets out to destroy the essential content of nationalist history writing.

In passing he caricatures Marx and Engels with a few phrases taken out of context: "A small caste of robber landlords dictate to the Irish people the conditions with which they are allowed to hold the land and live on it", and "The Irish landlords are confederated for a fiendish war of extermination against the cottiers." The implication is that Marx and Engels are dupes of a simple-minded nationalist version of history. In fact even English liberals from the period can be found making equally savage accusations against the landlords.

One of the principal themes of the revisionists is the rehabilitation of the landlords, showing that they were not to blame for rural misery and were often either brave improvers or hapless victims themselves.

Foster traces the 'polluted stream' through Griffith, founder of Sinn Fein, who idealised Grattan's parliament but also identified 'Irish' with 'Catholic'. Pearse, in parallel, used Irish history as a 'disingenuous propagandist', misrepresented Davis as dedicated to physical violence and romanticised a Celtic racial tradition.

He celebrates the achievements of new Irish historians who challenged every received popular notion. "By the sixties the work of a whole generation of scholars had exploded the basis for popular assumptions about early Irish history: the conquest, the plantation, the eighteenth-century parliament, the record of landlordism, and most of all the continuities between the various manifestations of nationalism..." (p. 140)

While there are many progressive elements in the body of new history writing, Fanning's declarations leave no room for doubt that the purpose was not simply to challenge the myths of nationalism. It was to mobilise historians as a force against resurgent republicanism. "Nowhere else in the European, North American or antipodean democracies does the writing of twentieth-century history demand so constant a confrontation with mythologies designed to legitimise violence as a political weapon in a bid to overthrow the state."

An article by revisionist Steven Ellis, in the book, is a good example of how a specific area of revisionist history challenges nationalist assumptions. It focuses on how Irish historians treat the English and Gaelic worlds of the late middle ages, "The adoption for late medieval Ireland of an anachronistic Hibernocentric perspective, with associated nationalist themes, is a

conceptual trap. . . Since the perspective and concepts chosen owe more to modern aspirations than contemporary preoccupations, nationalist interpretations necessarily reveal steady 'progress' towards an independent Ireland". (p. 1801)

This is an important question for materialist historians in challenging the idealisations of nationalism. The attempt by nationalists to read back the existence of an Irish national movement into the centuries before the United Irishmen is one of the key myths which any scientific history must demolish. Ellis's article, however, provides the starting point for the most powerful nationalist response to revisionism in this book, from the historian Fr. Bradshaw.

The first reply to the revisionists is from journalist Desmond Fennell, well-known for his reactionary polemics against what he regards as the un-Irishness of the ruling political caste in Dublin. Fennell characterises revisionism as a "new moral interpretation of the known major facts ... a new allocation of rightness and wrongness, as between the ideas and actions of the Irish and the ideas and intentions of the British ... to discredit the main achievement of that republican nationalist tradition, the Irish revolution. Revisionism, both in its ultimate thrust and as a matter of objective fact, is the historiography of the Irish counter revolution". To that extent Fennell is right. However, his purpose is to positively advocate, as a necessity for the health of the nation, "a bonding popular history" an official nationalist history which contributes in a major way to national unity.

The pivots of the book are Foster and Bradshaw. This Cambridge professor attacks the revisionists' deliberate blindness to and evasion of the catastrophic nature of key events in Irish history. And crucially, on the trauma of the nineteenth century famine, neglect is the main charge, and what little was written adopted a distant academic tone, thus "cerebralisising and thereby, desensitising the trauma".

Bradshaw locates three forms of distortion in the revisionist enterprise—firstly, invincible scepticism leading to relativism and a corrosive cynicism: "An obvious

instance ... their iconoclastic assault upon the so-called apostolic succession of national heroes". (Revisionist attempts to disconnect modern republicanism from that of the 18th century United Irishmen are indeed a falsification of history. On the other hand many nationalists try to put into the same 'progressive' category heroes such as feudal bishops (Lawrence O'Toole) and patriotic aristocrats (Patrick Sarsfield) creating a mythical nationalism which even contradicts republicanism.)

Bradshaw goes on to attack revisionism for 'extruding' nationality altogether from past history. Finally there is the revisionist "reaction against the controlling conception of nationalist historiography, the notion of a 'national past' of Irish history". He responds: "In the words of a current historiographical catchphrase which might well serve as the revisionists' motto, Irish history is not the past of the modern Irish nation: the past is a foreign country".

The question of interpreting the past in terms of its future is a challenging one for socialists. Bradshaw's response however is disastrous. He seeks "to make capital out of the past and to put the history of earlier centuries to practical use". As Hugh Kearney replies later: "Bradshaw in effect is stating that the historian's duty is to propagate a myth, despite its wrongness, for the sake of its supposedly beneficent consequences".

Bradshaw insists on the historian as mediator 'between the actuality of the historical experience and contemporary perceptions of it'. Despite leading the reaction against revisionism, Bradshaw is not an anti-imperialist. His nationalism is in no way militant. For him, "the task of the historian is to communicate an understanding of the tragic past that is both historically true and humanly responsive" in order to turn "the least promising human situation to constructive purpose". Obviously, there is no such thing as 'value free' history. Revolutionaries presenting historical explanations will passionately indict exploitation and champion human liberation. Marxists understand that a scientific historical method is only possible within a world view corresponding to the

tasks of human progress in which only the working class internationally has a compelling historical interest.

Therefore, the bourgeois perspective of even the most 'scientific' history is its central limitation. Such history dissolves out of existence class conflict between the propertied and the exploited, the landlords and the peasants, the bosses and the workers, slaves and slave owners.

The working class historical perspective is no less scientific than the best of bourgeois historical method. There is a progressive side to modern Irish history writing, despite its use as propaganda against the anti-imperialist struggle, in the wealth of new insight into social development across the centuries.

The editor of this excellent volume comments on the dearth of Marxist history-writing on Ireland: "From James Connolly, through Emile Strauss and Desmond Greaves to the conceptually sophisticated work of contemporary scholars like Paul Bew and Henry Patterson, Marxist scholarship has encountered considerable resistance within Irish historiography, while the generalising models of international Marxist scholars, such as Perry Anderson, Immanuel Wallerstein, Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess, have exercised even less influence..."

Anthony Coughlan's essay, 'Ireland's Marxist Historians', doesn't help much here. It is an unapologetically left nationalist presentation from the Irish Stalinist tradition. It is also consciously sectarian in its denigration and ignoring of Marxist work by those not espousing Stalinist left nationalism. Inevitably Coughlan focuses on the writing and political action of James Connolly as an issue in Irish historical debate.

He does not, of course, condescend to mention that rigorous critical work on Connolly, from an anti-imperialist standpoint, has been carried out by Irish Marxists opposed to his own tradition of adaptation to Irish nationalism.

The pioneering work in this area is available from the Irish Workers Group under the title: Connolly: A Marxist Analysis. (Price: £5.00 inc. P&P).

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