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# **Northern Ireland**

# **A MARXIST ANALYSIS**

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- 1 Over the 20 years of the troubles in Northern Ireland, the analysis and perspectives of the marxists have been strikingly confirmed. While every other tendency within society has been caught entirely unaware by these events, the marxists have been able to explain the fundamental processes at work. In this laboratory of social ferment the superiority of marxism over all other modes of thought has been demonstrated. It has been the victory of scientific thinking over empiricism, of 'foresight over astonishment!'
- 2 Twenty years ago a revolutionary opportunity existed in the north. The crimes of the reformists and the stalinists, together with the infantile ultra-leftism of some of those involved in these events, combined to allow this opportunity to slip by. By the early 1970s, the working class paid for these crimes and errors in the form of intense sectarianism reaction. In 1975/76 the working class intervened to halt the drift to all-out sectarian conflict. For a period of years class issues came to the fore. Again these opportunities were squandered by the rotten role of the trade union leaders in particular. The aftermath of the hunger strikes of the early 1980s, coupled with the industrial and political defeats suffered by the working class in Britain, prepared the way for a new period of relatively mild reaction. In this context the 1985 signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement provoked a fierce sectarian backlash, deepened the reaction and further set back the Labour movement. The result of these decades of reaction and missed opportunity has been the entrenchment and reinforcement of the sectarian division. The tasks of building a revolutionary party and accomplishing the socialist revolution have been complicated and made much more difficult.
- 3 During the troubles the inability of the ruling class to come up with a solution has been time and again proven. British imperialism laid the seeds of the present conflict with their past methods of 'divide and rule'. They partitioned Ireland for their own ends, primarily to forestall the socialist revolution in Ireland and thereby prevent its spreading to Britain.
- 4 From the point of view of the British ruling class, the historical reasons for partition are an anachronism today. They have no economic interest in maintaining partition. Imperialism — the direct control and economic exploitation of colonial territories — has been partially stood on its head. Control over the north does no mean economic rape and profit but a huge drain on the British exchequer of £1.5 billion each year. Partition permanently destabilises Ireland unleashing a conflict which threatens to spill over into the south and into Britain also. It has become a dangerous thorn in the side of the British capitalists.
- 5 Although they would much prefer to see the border done away with, the British ruling class are stuck with it. This is the key contradiction in the present situation. It is something which none of the political forces in the north, outside the marxists, have been able to grasp. Their complete blindness on this point explains the hopeless theoretical confusion which emanated from both sides during the recent SDLP/SF talks. British imperialism wants to withdraw from the north — but they cannot. Those who want to understand the conflict but who can't grasp this fact will remain forever bewildered by events.
- 6 It is the consequences of withdrawal and reunification on a capitalist basis which rule this out as an option.
- 7 The Protestant reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement gave a glimpse of what would result in the event of any real steps towards reunification being taken. Protestant resistance would lead to civil war, the expulsion of the Catholic population from much of the present state, ending up with the repartition of the country. Civil war would be a calamitous defeat for the working class in both parts of Ireland and a massive setback for the British workers. But a negative for the working class does not necessarily mean a positive for the bourgeois. Civil war would have calamitous consequences for the British ruling class. At home it would mean upheaval among the first and even second generation Irish population. It would leave a Lebanon on their doorstep. Internationally it would unleash a wave of anti-British feeling. A trade embargo of British goods in the US would be one possible result. Because British imperialism cannot afford to go down this road they have been forced to drop any serious efforts to dismantle the northern state and remove the border.
- 8 Capitalist re-unification is not an answer for the bourgeois. Nor can they achieve a lasting settlement on the basis of the present constitutional arrangement. The Catholic minority cannot be reconciled with their lot in a poverty ridden state. Their aspiration for unity is an expression of discontent and a demand for change. Likewise independence is no answer. This idea crops up from time to time in the verbal posturings of Paisley and some other Loyalists but it has no basis of support in the Protestant community. Protestant workers see that it would mean their being put on rations. Negotiated in-

dependence in any case is an impossibility. Just as the Protestants will never accept capitalist re-unification, so the Catholics will never voluntarily slip their necks into the noose of an independent loyalist state. Their resistance would result in civil war, just as would Protestant resistance to capitalist re-unification.

● 9 After twenty years of failed bourgeois initiatives and 'solutions', and particularly after nine years of the crude methods and crass errors of the Thatcher government, the prospect of even a temporary accommodation within the north has receded out of view. The social and economic crisis of capitalism in the north has now produced a complete paralysis in the political thinking of the bourgeois.

● 10 Behind all the superficial rhetoric of Tory Ministers about 'political progress' the real despair of the bourgeois was well expressed by the *Economist* in a recent editorial. 'Most political problems have solutions. A few do not. Northern Ireland is one of them. Certainly now and perhaps for decades.'

● 11 It has been the failure of the Anglo-Irish Agreement which has forced this conclusion. In 1985, the bourgeois press universally hailed the agreement as an 'historical breakthrough' and an act of statesmanship by Thatcher. In truth the Agreement merely compounded one Thatcher error with an even greater one.

● 12 Thatcher's stupid intransigence during the H-Block hunger strikes created the mass political base for Sinn Fein and gave a certain renewed impetus to the Provos. The election of Sinn Fein representatives at every political level subsequently gave the government its severest headache. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was conceived as a result. Its purpose, through a combination of concession and repression was to deal a double blow at Sinn Fein and the Provos. With Sinn Fein isolated, the government ultimately hoped to open the way to devolved government and some form of negotiated internal settlement.

● 13 The results have been completely contrary to those intended. As the Agreement was being signed the marxist warned that; even the paltry cosmetic concessions being hinted at would be still-born due to Protestant opposition; that it would lead to more repression — not less; that ultimately the Catholic community would be further alienated — not appeased; that the SDLP, instead of being enticed into a devolved government, would be driven in a nationalist direction, and that the Provos campaign would continue unabated. All these predictions have been borne out to the letter. The Agreement is in tatters. Underlying Protestant opposition is as strong as ever. Catholics are increasingly sceptical. There is greater sectarian polarisation — not less. Political deadlock, not political progress, has been achieved!

● 14 Protestant resistance rendered the project still-born. Yet the Agreement has not been entirely swept away. In the first place this has been because the mass outrage of Protestants somewhat subsided as the Agreement was seen to be ineffective. Secondly it was because of the role of the Unionist leadership. Paisley and Molyneaux, having been forced to give reluctant support to one strike against the Agreement thereafter choose the 'safer' strategy of negotiation not mass mobilisation and confrontation. Both these 'gentlemen' feared most of all that they might unleash a movement of the Protestant working class which they would be unable to control. They likewise feared that the defeat of Thatcher by a movement of Protestant workers, albeit of a quite reactionary character, would act as a spur to the class movement in Britain and in the north.

● 15 Under no real pressure from the Protestants, or from any other source, to scrap the Agreement and because they have nothing to put in its place, the British government are content to continue with it, as an exercise in joint north-south repression and nothing more.

● 16 The southern bourgeois long ago gave up any aspiration to Irish unity. They simply wish to see the instability contained within the north. The Haughey government, like its predecessor is quite willing to go along with the British policy of repression. Occasional outbursts of indignation at excesses in British policy are for cosmetic purposes. They are content to maintain the structures of the Agreement despite the absence of any concessions from the British, and will so continue until the mood in the south or in the Catholic areas of the north as expressed through the SDLP should force a change.

● 17 As first envisaged the Anglo-Irish Agreement never got beyond the starting blocks. The structures which remain will most likely be retained for a further period, although to both Catholic and Protestant workers in the north, it is already clearly seen as a dead letter.

● 18 The illusions that the Agreement would create conditions for devolution and power sharing

have been shattered. Instead its very existence acts as a barrier even to talks on this issue. The Unionists are prepared to talk only if the Agreement is suspended. the SDLP, for the sake of their electoral base cannot afford such a concession. So, three years into the Agreement, the ruling class have not been able to progress beyond the stage of talks about talks about talks!

- 19 A new political initiative such as devolution, an assembly or covention is unlikely for a further period. Eventually the government will be forced to attempt some such move. While now less likely than ever, it is not entirely excluded that an accomodation might be reached between the Unionist and SDLP leaders and elections held to some new local parliament.

- 20 Such a result would be very difficult to achieve and liable to fall to pieces at any moment during its conception and establishment. No matter what the subjective wishes of the SDLP and Unionist politicians, the basis for power sharing has been even further eroded by the sectarian reaction of recent years, and by the emergence of Sinn Fein as a political force. even if established, a new local parliament would solve nothing. It would merely transfer the political paralysis and sectarian squabbling of local government onto a larger stage. As with all its predecessors it would come apart at the seams at some point.

- 21 Two decades of economic crisis, of sectarian violence, of political instability and of missed opportunities by the leaders of the labour movement have created a complete political impasse. Lasting and functioning democratic institutions are now impossible on a capitalist basis.

- 22 Unable to advance towards even a temporary political settlement, the ruling class are thrown back to military means. Repression is the distilled essence of their policy. Everything else having failed, the Tories have greatly stepped up the use of repression. A continuation and intensification of this policy is the most likely scenario for a further period.

- 23 The reintroduction of internment is not likely. The sophisticated apparatus of repression, non-jury courts, years on remand, covert operations including the shoot-to-kill policy of the SAS, have all been developed as a more effective means of achieving the same results. The British bourgeois regard the experience of 1971 when the Heath government bowed to Unionist pressure and introduced internment as a costly mistake. Even with the much more sophisticated intelligence they have since built up, the disadvantages outweigh the gains. In the unlikely event that they were to take this step it would be due to political pressures, not military advice, and, as in 1971, the reaction in the Catholic areas of the north would throw the whole situation back.

- 24 Repression breeds resentment. It acts as a spur to the Provos guaranteeing them a certain level of recruitment. In the end it proves counter-productive. It is not possible to constrain the situation indefinitely by military means alone.

- 25 At some stage the ruling class will be forced to recognise the dangers of continuing with a purely military holding operation and be forced to attempt some new political initiative. In the sudden lurches of the bourgeois from political to military methods and back again, from concession to repression, is expressed their total impotence in face of this national conflict of their own past making. The capitalists have no solution, yet because they cannot afford to do nothing they are doomed to continuously persue their hopeless quest to find one.

- 26 All perspectives, including economic perspectives are extremely conditional. The present boom in world capitalism has been of a much more protracted character than could originally have been anticipated. This has been due to special factors — the negative Keynesianism of the Reagan administration, the super-exploitation of the colonial countries, and the huge expansion of credit which has boosted consumer spending in the advanced countries. The length of this upswing in no way betokens an ability on the part of the capitalists to overcome the contradictions of their system. Nor does it signal a new epoch of economic expansion.

Fearing recession in the aftermath of the October 1987 stockmarket collapse, the capitalist powers outside the US have been prepared to pump 100-140 billion dollars into the world economy to finance the US budget deficit and stave off a collapse of the dollar. This has been one of the main reasons why the stockmarket collapse was not followed by recession in the world economy in 1988.

- 27 The present epoch remains one of stagnation and crisis. Within it the cyclical rhythm of capitalist production remains. A new recession is inevitable at a certain stage.

- 28 While not certain, it is likely that this next recession will be of a severe character, possibly a deeper downturn than occurred in 1974 or 1979. A new 1929 type depression is not ruled out.

- 29 There is no final crisis of capitalism. Boom creates the conditions for slump and vice versa. A new recession will prepare for a new upswing after a period. what distinguishes this epoch of stagnation from the previous (1950-1974) period of expansion is that the general tendency through boom and slump is towards the sharpening of the contradictions of the system and towards economic contraction. At a certain stage a new 1929 style depression will become a likely prospect despite the measures of the bourgeois to avert it.

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● 30 British capitalism has been labouring under the delusion of a revival in its fortunes under Thatcher. When the British capitalists had confidence in their system they compiled statistics as accurately as possible in order to help guide their activities. Now statistics are manipulated to disguise and distort the real developments in the economy and to hide their social effects from the working class. The Thatcherite image of British 'economic recovery' is a mirage drawn up in this way.

● 31 While Britain's growth rate has speeded up in recent years this has not been due to a revival of British manufacturing. Oil revenues, asset sales and a huge expansion of personal credit have kept consumer spending high. The service sector has grown — but not manufacturing. Manufacturing output has only passed 1979 levels, leaving British capitalism relatively further behind its major rivals despite the fact that Britain's growth rate has been greater than its main rivals since late 1977.

● 32 The buoyant domestic market has been fed not from home but from abroad. The former workshop of the world has been faced with a growing trade deficit. In 1987 this amounted to a colossal £13 billion. The truth behind the Thatcherite illusion is that British industry has become, not leaner and fitter, but leaner and sicker than it was in 1979.

● 33 Increases in productivity have not been achieved by investment in new machinery, but by closing down whole areas of less productive industry, and more particularly by raising the rate of exploitation of Labour. Growth in productivity by such means is no more than a short term fix allowing the capitalists to reap huge profits for a period. It is no substitute for investment in research and development, plant and machinery. It is true that more recently there has been an increase in productive investment by the British capitalists. However it still remains at very low levels both by historical comparisons and relative to Britain's main capitalist rivals.

● 34 The government has been partially able to disguise this continued erosion of the manufacturing base only because of its revenues from North-sea oil and also because of the money raised by the sale of state assets. Tax cuts and gains in living standards for a layer of better paid workers have allowed Thatcher to continue to parade the illusions of a strong economy and prosperity.

● 35 Now, even before the onset of a new recession, Thatcher's economic policies are coming apart at the seams. Oil revenues have been falling, pointing not just to a deficit in manufacturing trade but to an overall balance of payments deficit. At the same time inflation has been increasing (up to 6%) threatening competitiveness.

● 36 The attempt to rein back the economy through interest rate rises has already cancelled at a stroke, the gains workers have made through tax cuts. Higher interest rates present new problems for the capitalists. They cut spending power and reduce credit thereby restricting the domestic market. At the same time by increasing the value of sterling they make British goods less competitive at home and abroad. Further, they make it more difficult for British capitalists to find a way out through investment because they raise the cost of capital.

● 37 Having deluded themselves about the benefits of Thatcherism, in cutting wages and living standards, the British capitalists are now being presented with the bill. A slowing up of production is now likely, possibly even a recession in Britain *before* the advent of a world capitalist downturn. When a new world recession does begin the British ruling class will find themselves in a relatively weaker position than they were in, in 1974.

● 38 The Northern Ireland economy has been largely bypassed by the world upswing. Whereas, British GDP rose by an average of 3% per year between 1981-86, the North's GDP rose by only 1% per year. More recent upward revision of the North's GDP due to a claimed 'computer error' are suspect. Even if the higher figures are correct the increase must have been confined to the public sector as manufacturing output remained flat and net farm income declined between 1981-86, the year in question. In 1981-87 manufacturing output fell by 1% in the North compared to a rise of 5.4% in Britain and the North. Only in the immediate past has the acceleration of growth in Britain had an effect on the North. Since 1987 there has been some manufacturing growth reflected in a rise of 1,300 in manufacturing employment between March 1987 and 1988. This growth has been confined to certain sectors notably textiles and building materials.

● 39 As in Britain the growth in consumer spending has been mainly due to the expansion of personal credit, and to growth in service industries and in the public sector. Personal spending by the banks has risen sharply. New Hire-Purchase agreements have risen by 13.9% in 1987 and rose at an annual rate of 15.7% during the first quarter of 1988.

● 40 The years of boom have increased the overdependence of the economy on the service sector and on public spending. Public spending now accounts for 75% of GDP. With the tiny manufacturing base, public services are only maintained on the basis of the annual subvention from the British exchequer, now a staggering £1.5 billion, (not including the cost of maintaining the army presence), or more than one third of total GDP.

- 41 The stabilisation of unemployment levels over the past few years has not been due to manufacturing revival. Numbers employed in manufacturing remain under 100,000. Unemployment figures have been artificially reduced by emigration, Restart and other government measures to frighten claimants off the dole, and by the expansion of the phoney job creation schemes. Total employment fell steadily until 1987. Then, between March '87 - March '88, it rose by 5,000. Fifty per cent of this increase was due to an expansion of the ACE programme. By 1990, based on present projections, ACE will be the biggest employer in the North. Already the largest private employer in West Belfast is the Catholic Church through its 'Cathedral Enterprises' which has been given lavish funding for ACE places by the government in the hope that it will act as a counterweight to Sinn Fein.
- 42 For political reasons the severest impact of the Tory governments monetarist measures were never applied in the North. Public spending has been increased, if only marginally. Non profitable industries were massively subsidised — to the tune of £35 per employee per week. Privatisation of public services has not been carried through to the same extent as in Britain.
- 43 The Tories have now changed course. The political implications of further driving down living standards in the North have been put to the side. Total public spending is projected to fall by 0.7% between 1988-'89. Health Boards have been issued with a directive instructing them to put key non-medical services out to private tender. Possibly in retribution for their role in opposing the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the 11,000 employees of Shorts and Harland and Wolff, face the privatisation of these industries with the probable outcome that the shipyard and large sections of Shorts will face closure after a period. The electricity service is also to be privatised. Plans to add the airports, the buses and Belfast harbour to the list of sell-offs are under consideration.
- 44 These measures, particularly the threat to Shorts and the shipyard, will have a devastating effect on the economy, if they are carried out. The closure or part closure of these two companies would create West Belfast conditions of joblessness in East Belfast - with enormous social and political ramifications.
- 45 These measures, against the background of a slowdown of the British economy and of the onset of a new world recession at some stage, present a bleak prospect. The situation will be disimproved, not bettered, if the proposals to create a single European market by 1992 go ahead.
- 46 The integration of Europe is impossible on a capitalist basis. The separate and antagonistic interests of each capitalist class in Europe will remain after 1992. At best all that they can achieve is a customs union which suits their purpose in competing against the rival powers of the US and Japan. At this stage it is by no means certain that even this degree of co-operation will be achieved. A new recession would increase the antagonism between the major European powers — West Germany, France, Italy and Britain, threatening to scuttle the whole arrangements.
- 47 What is proposed is not the integration but the increased domination of Europe by its major powers, particularly West Germany. If the proposals go ahead the stronger economies will benefit. Ireland, North and South, will be at a double disadvantage with already weak economies and geographical remoteness from the main markets. When the Channel Tunnel is completed, Ireland will be the only community member to be physically separated from the European landmass. No amount of regional development aid will overcome these disadvantages.
- 48 Through the next period of booms and slumps in the world economy the prospect for the economy of the North is extremely bleak. Mass unemployment is a permanent feature. Over the next period living standards are set to fall in real terms as cutbacks, privatisation and the new round of Tory attacks on the poor begin to bite.
- 49 The economic crisis of capitalism is at the root of the hopeless inability of the capitalists to find a solution. when the capitalist system developed it played an enormously progressive role in expanding productive forces worldwide. It was then able to achieve the voluntary assimilation of different peoples and cultures into the emerging nation states of the west, resolving or partially resolving national conflicts within these states in the process.
- 50 Today the capitalist system is in deep and organic crisis and is capable only of playing an entirely reactionary role in every field. The productive forces have outgrown the limitations of private ownership and of the nation state. The crisis of the system is manifest in a general slowing up of production, in the destruction of existing productive forces, in the existence of excess or unused capacity

throughout industry in both boom and slump, in growing unemployment and in the increasing impoverishment of growing sections of the working class, the underemployed and the unemployed. In this period of economic decay the general tendency is towards the exacerbation of ethnic conflicts even within the territories of the powerhouses of capitalism.

● 51 In this context of world crisis it is the special crisis of British capitalism which explains their political impasse in the North. The North is a poverty-ridden state. Unemployment is in reality around 20%. Household incomes are 20% lower than in Britain while the prices of all basic essentials, apart from housing costs, are higher. Twentytwo percent of people are dependent on social security handouts compared to thirteen percent in Britain.

● 52 The status quo represents poverty. The capitalist alternative to the status quo offers nothing better. The ruling class can never present a solution which will convince both sections of the working class that they stand to gain. As a result they are constantly thrown back on the methods of coercion. Likewise the paralysis of the southern Irish bourgeoisie in face of the unresolved national problems is due to their historic weakness and to the particular crisis of Irish capitalism today.

● 53 The strategy of the Provisional IRA / Sinn Fein is a culmination of wrong ideas and wrong methods. It can never succeed.

● 54 This strategy is based on a complete misunderstanding of the objectives of British imperialism. Adams, Morrison, and McGuinness like the old leaders they replaced fail to see that it is only the fear of civil war which prevents British imperialism taking steps to end partition and withdraw. The irony of the military campaign to 'force the Brits out' is that by multiplying the fears of Protestants of a state run by the IRA and thereby ensuring an even greater Protestant backlash in the event of withdrawal, its net effect has been to give the British ruling class even less option but to remain.

● 55 In their description of Fianna Fail as 'still a republican party' and in their demand that the Haughey government convene a conference of all Irish political parties to exercise 'self-determination'. The Sinn Fein/IRA leadership are as blind to the real role of the southern bourgeois as they are to that of the British bourgeois.

● 56 When Sinn Fein developed as an electoral force in the 1980's it presented a radical, semi-socialist image. Then the marxists explained that this was just a veneer masking the same old nationalism of the first generation of the provisionals and Sinn Fein leaders. Now the veneer has worn away and even the pretence of socialism has largely been abandoned. Sinn Fein are really at one with imperialism, with the southern bourgeoisie and with the SDLP in that they offer only capitalist solutions. Their proposals differ from those emanating from Whitehall and Westminster in that they are even more unreal and more utterly utopian.

● 57 Sinn Fein can remain as an electoral force because of the lack of any alternative to give expression to the anger of the Catholic workers particularly on the issue of repression. Because of their sectarian appeal and outlook they can achieve nothing. At best they can become the majority party of the minority although this is not the most likely perspective.

● 58 The wedding of the incorrect analysis and programme of the Provos/Sinn Fein to the false methods of individual terrorism is a sure recipe for disaster.

● 59 Individual terrorism substitutes the role of the individual for the role of the class. It accords the masses no role and thereby diminishes mass struggle. Isolated acts of terror, even the most successful attacks on the state forces, in the end, only provide the justification for more repression. They strengthen the state not weaken it.

● 60 The results of the Provisionals' campaign confirm these conclusions. The state has been given the excuse to construct a sophisticated apparatus of repression and to perpetrate a series of atrocities which they would not have got away with outside Northern Ireland. The working class has been confused, disoriented and demoralised by the Provos methods.

● 61 Only the working class, united as a class carrying out socialist tasks, can remove imperialism, end partition and resolve the national conflict. By greatly deepening the sectarian division between Catholic and Protestant workers the Provos set back the class struggle. Their net contribution to the genuine 'anti-imperialist' struggle, the struggle for socialism in Ireland and in Britain, is therefore negative.

● 62 On the one side the Provos campaign is a cul-de-sac. On the other the factors which gave rise to the Provos in the first place — the economic crisis, the repressive methods of the state and the failure

of the labour movement to provide any alternative means of struggle for the Catholic youth, all remain and guarantee them a sufficient base of support to continue the campaign.

● 63 When Sinn Fein developed its electoral base the marxists resisted the illusion that the ballot box would replace the armalite as the method of struggle. Likewise at the time of the Hillsborough agreement the marxists explained that this would not lead to the military defeat of the Provos and the ending of violence. More recently the Marxists refuted any notion that the Sinn Fein/SDLP talks might lead to a ceasefire. With capitalism at an impasse, terrorism has become endemic in the north. The Provos campaign can continue virtually indefinitely.

● 64 This fact plus the futile nature of the campaign and the false ideas on which it is based, is a recipe for splits and more splits. The breakaway of Republican Sinn Fein was the start, not the end of this process. Divisions exist and will tend to surface between the old style nationalists who lean to the right and much of the working class youth who lean towards socialist ideas. The conflict between the mutually exclusive military and political tactics is unresolved. Differences on the nature of the military campaign, on what methods are justified and between those who advocate a war of attrition and those who favour 'bringing things to a head', are inevitable.

● 65 Whether these divisions lead to defections and open splits, or remain at the level of simmering resentment depends on the concrete circumstances. Fear of a bloody feud is a powerful factor holding the Provos together. More important is the absence of any alternative. If a class alternative existed and could demonstrate in practice the superiority of mass methods of struggle, the divisions in the broad republican movement would come to the surface and the best elements would be won over.

● 66 A section of the Provos have grown impatient at the lack of success of their strategy of a war of attrition stretching over ten, twenty or more years. This, together with the fact that the organisation is now equipped with large quantities of highly sophisticated weaponry — enough to equip a small army according to one estimate! — makes an attempt to dramatically escalate the military campaign, the most likely immediate prospect. How far this attempt can go is uncertain. Even the most madcap militarists in the Provos are limited by the mood of the mass of the Catholics and by lack of volunteers.

● 67 Opposed to a war of attrition are the advocates of 'a final push'. Those who propose this course wish to destabilise the North and are prepared to provoke civil war. They are totally blind to the realities of what this would mean. Rather than leading to reunification as they believe, civil war would result in a massacre of the Catholics, the expulsion of those who survive from much of the North and the entrenchment of the division of the country through repartition.

● 68 Proponents of this lunatic strategy of military escalation are now to the forefront within the Provos. The result of such an escalation, with sectarian atrocities such as Enniskillen always likely whether through intent or by error, would undoubtedly be to further destabilise the North. But weighed against them are factors which would ensure that this offensive, like those which have gone before, would eventually run into the sand.

● 69 The mood of the Catholic working class and the working class as a whole is not for all out sectarian conflict. Any atrocities would generate hostility and loss of support. Under these conditions the greater military might of the state would be decisive. The state could contain whatever the Provos throw at it. Losses of personnel and of support would eventually bring the Provos to a point of exhaustion. There would be a re-evaluation of tactics and a return to the strategy of a long war of attrition.

● 70 Neither by all out provocation nor by attrition will the Provos succeed. It is not the way that individual terror is used but the method itself that is at fault.

● 71 The situation is further complicated by the reappearance of the INLA, now called the INLA and the IPLO. The only significance of these tiny groups is their capacity to further destabilise the situation with occasional acts of sectarian provocation.

● 72 The loyalist paramilitaries do not have the same roots in the Protestant community as do the Provisionals in the Catholic areas. Their grip is one of fear not of support.

● 73 These groups are lumpen in composition and thoroughly reactionary in character. Their activities reflect the strata on which they are based — vile sectarian atrocities, gangsterism, protection rackets and racketeering. Generally speaking, they are badly organised and ill-trained. Their 'operators' are less politically motivated and, by and large, less intelligent than those of the republican groups.

● 74 In the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish Agreement both the UDA and the UVF experienced a certain revival. This growth was limited to the lumpen and semi-lumpen sections. Even during this period of mass Protestant backlash, the distaste of the mass of the Protestants for these groups was clear.



- 75 Despite initial growth neither the UDA nor the UVF were able to capitalise on the situation. The waning of the mass protests has left these groups in deeper crisis than pre 1985. The UDA in particular has suffered setbacks. The removal of its commander-in-chief, Andy Tyrie, by an untypically bloodless palace coup, came about because of the organisation's problems and the bitter dissent these have provoked. The UVF remains as it has been for most of the troubles, a small and quite ruthless murder gang.
- 76 Notwithstanding their problems these groups have the capacity to continue and from time to time to escalate their sectarian murder campaigns. They have acquired new arms including modern high velocity rifles. Despite arms finds by the state leading to the capture of much of this weaponry, the loyalist paramilitaries especially the UVF, have a greater firepower than ever before. These weapons have been used to effect in some recent sectarian attacks. More such attacks are certain in the future, especially in reply to an escalation of Provo shootings and bombings.
- 77 The loyalist groups have been thoroughly infiltrated by the state. Their social composition breeds informers and treachery. The state holds them on a leash. If they go too far with their activities the leash is tightened by raids and arrests. On the other hand they are fed information from the state forces and used to eliminate known republicans. They act as unofficial death squads, targeted against republicans, but are a threat to socialist activists, now and more so in the future.
- 78 In the event of a massive Protestant backlash with movements to independence and civil war, it would not be to the paramilitaries that the mass of Protestants would turn. Just as the Ulster Clubs, and the shadowy Ulster Resistance sprang up during the Anglo-Irish protests, like organisations would be thrown up in the heat of these events. Elements within the most right-wing sections of both the Official Unionists and the DUP would emerge as the most likely leaders. The paramilitaries would be merely auxiliaries to such a movement, their chief role to provide added muscle on the streets.
- 79 The activities and outlook of the paramilitaries lead to only one logical conclusion. Lebanonisation — the cantonisation of the North into spheres of paramilitary influence and ultimately civil war.
- 80 They have not been able to proceed down this road only because of the resistance and opposition of the mass of the working class. The army's policy of containment has been partially effective only because the mood of the majority of workers, Catholic and Protestant, has been against civil war. Should this circumstance change the state forces would not be able to contain the situation. Army officers have already admitted as much in their plans, drawn up in the 1970s, to evacuate Catholics from the Belfast area in the event of civil war.
- 81 Only the labour movement can avert the threat of civil war by mobilising the working class to deal with the bigots. The army can keep people apart to a degree. The labour movement can unite them. Throughout the troubles it has been movements of the working class, for example, in 1969 and 1975-76, which have halted the drift to civil war.
- 82 The sectarian reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement was cut across by the courageous stand of the DHSS workers who struck against sectarian intimidation in August 1986. Their actions struck a deep chord among the working class and the paramilitaries were forced to retreat. On two subsequent occasions DHSS workers, under the influence of the marxists and despite the stance of their union officials, have given a lead and taken successful action against sectarian threats.
- 83 The implementation of their strategy of a 'final push' by the Provos and the certain reaction of the UDA and UVF make a resurgence of sectarian violence the most likely short term prospect. Selected assassinations, random killings, even a return to no-warning car bombs are all possible.
- 84 Given that the mood of the working class is opposed to civil war, this new upsurge, as with previous upsurges, will be contained but possibly at a bloody cost. Movements of sections of the working class against sectarianism, even a generalised movement as in 1975-76, are a possibility at any stage. The various sectarian forces can maintain their activities but cannot bring about a sectarian 'solution' i.e. civil war. The working class are able to resist sectarianism but, because of the rottenness of the right-wing trade union leadership and due to the absence of a political voice, cannot go on the offensive to smash it.
- 85 Civil war is ruled out and as an immediate prospect, and could not come about until the working class had suffered decisive defeats. The larger paramilitaries ultimately have to take note of the

mood of the working class communities in which they operate. The smallest groups, too tiny to worry about support are capable of carrying out atrocities no matter what the reaction but these groups are too small to fundamentally affect the situation. In the last analysis they are more likely to provoke class opposition than civil war.

● 86 A stalemate now exists. Imperialism can do no more than carry out an exercise in containment by military means, disguised from time to time by various political 'initiatives'.

● 87 The result is cycles of sectarianism, followed by united class movements against sectarianism. Another such cycle is now being entered.

● 88 History does not move in ever repeating circles. No matter how slowly it may evolve, there is always a progression or development in some direction. Periods of apparent stalemate prepare for periods of rapid and explosive change at a certain stage.

● 89 There can be a protracted but not an eternal stalemate in the North. Sooner or later the small changes taking place must tip the pendulum decisively one way or another to allow one of the contending forces to break through.

● 90 The ruling class have no answers and never will have any. The deadlock must either be broken by the forces of sectarian reaction or by the united struggles of the labour movement. Either the setbacks and defeats suffered by the working class will pass a decisive point so that it is unable to prevent all-out sectarian conflict or else the working class will succeed in overcoming the obstacle of the reformist leadership at their head and will unite to transform society dealing a fatal blow to sectarianism in the process. From the very complex, seemingly contradictory and confusing pattern of events, history will ultimately extract the simple choice — either socialism or civil war.

● 91 An examination of the forces at work within the North allows only one conclusion; that the situation had worsened over the past 20 years. During this period the spiral of sectarianism has been checked but not broken. By missing opportunity after opportunity to turn events in their favour the leaders of the labour movement have repeatedly restored the initiative to the bigots.

● 92 Now, the very fact of 20 years of violence is itself a factor complicating the situation and providing an added obstacle to class unity. Workers are partially inured to the violence. A whole generation has grown up knowing nothing else. For them the 'Troubles' did not have a beginning and they have no expectation that there will be an end.

● 93 A perspective which is based solely on developments within a single country will inevitably be unbalanced and ultimately incorrect. This is especially so when developments within that country are out of gear with world developments as is the case in Northern Ireland.

● 94 The crisis of capitalism is a world crisis. Movements of the working class are now also interlinked internationally as never before. Even should sectarian reaction succeed in more decisively throwing back the labour movement in the North developments internationally especially in Britain and in the South would most likely cut across this reaction at a certain stage.

● 95 From a 'national' outlook the situation is less favourable than in the past. But from a world viewpoint the sharpening of the class struggle and the large battles which now lie ahead make the situation more favourable. It is the world outlook, not the provincial view, which is correct.

● 96 In general, the working class in the advanced countries has been thrown on to the defensive through the 1980s. The recession in 1979-81 and the monetarist offensive launched by the bourgeoisie, had a stunning effect on industrial struggles. Even during the present boom struggles have been mostly defensive in character. The workers have been restrained by the continued assault of the ruling class and by the role of the reformist leaders. After 1979 there was a turn to the political front and the election of governments of the left parties in a number of countries. These 'reformist' governments either immediately or very quickly embarked on a policy of counter reform.

● 97 Whereas in the past there existed in industry a layer of shop stewards and branch activists confident enough to act irrespective of the national union leaders, this is now not the case. Workers have learnt that it is not so easy to win strikes and a large number of activists have been burnt out in the process. In the course of the bitter struggles, including the defeats of the recent period, a new generation of shop stewards and local militants is being prepared. They will take their positions more aware than their predecessors of what is at stake and therefore more ready to draw revolutionary conclusions from their actions. In a number of countries, shop-stewards movements prepared to lead struggles have begun to emerge although generally speaking the process is still at an early stage.

- 98 It is not possible to precisely describe the effects a new recession will have on the industrial movements of the class. We do not join with the sects who mechanically equate recession with revolution. Recession can have quite the opposite results. The revolutionary character of this epoch arises from the general crisis of capitalism, and the rapid lurches of the economy from recession to boom and back, all within the context of this crisis.
- 99 The effects of the new recession will depend on concrete circumstances and will vary from country to country. Even if its initial effect is to stun the working class, important and bitter defensive battles will take place.
- 100 Generally speaking, the most likely result of this recession will be a movement of the working class into and towards their traditional organisations. The class struggle will be taken into these organisations and the ideas and role of the leadership, who are defenders of capitalism, will be challenged. The emergence of a fresh layer of shop stewards will accelerate this process of the transformation of the trade unions. Similarly workers turning towards and joining the mass reformist parties will come into collision with the ideas and lifestyle of the leaders. A new chapter in the long process of the transformation of these organisations will be begun.
- 101 In Britain the same general processes have been taking place as in other advanced capitalist countries. Betrayal by the TUC has led to a number of setbacks and defeats on the industrial front, the most important being the defeat of the miners. The TUC tops have embraced the ideas of so-called 'new realism'. On the political front, there have also been setbacks with Tory victories at three successive general elections. Within the Labour Party, the right reformists, in reality the open advocates of counter reforms, have been strengthened at the top. The petty bourgeois layer of soft lefts have capitulated to the ideas and methods of the right.
- 102 In the past, during the twenties, thirties, and even in the early seventies, there existed a substantial layer of shop stewards in Britain who were prepared to conduct struggles even against the treacherous opposition of the union leaders. By and large this layer is missing today. Many of the older activists were quite unprepared for the offensive launched by the ruling class over the last decade and have been disoriented and worn out.
- 103 Previous rank and file movements were misled by the Communist Party which, up until the recent period, could boast many militants within its ranks. The Communist Party today has further degenerated and split, (losing most of its membership and influence in the process.) Some of its factions stand to the right of the Labour leadership.
- 104 The industrial role played by the Communist militants in the past is increasingly being filled by the genuine marxists today. In the coming battles, a new layer of generally younger and fresher activist will come to the fore. Within the unions, they will come into conflict with the class collaborationist policies of the right wing leaders. This layer can provide the solid industrial foundations of a future mass marxist tendency.
- 105 The victory of the right within the British Labour Party will prove to be a passing phenomenon. A future right wing Labour government, eventually ending up with a programme of counter reforms, would arouse the opposition of the trade union and Labour Party ranks. A ferment would develop within the Labour Party and the way would be prepared for a swing to the left and the strengthening of the marxists.
- 106 The right wing labour and trade union leaders with their fanciful notions of 'popular capitalism', of the 'disappearing working class' and of the ending of the class struggle are entirely out of touch with the social realities and with the real mood of the working class.
- 107 Thatcher's programme of attacks on the poor has bred enormous anger and resentment. An entire strata of society has been reduced to absolute poverty. Other layers, who during the recent boom have felt cushioned, are now beginning to be hit. Beneath the surface a storm is brewing.
- 108 The issue of poll tax is a potential catalyst for this anger. A large movement of opposition to this iniquitous tax is under way, especially in Scotland. As was the case in Liverpool, the influence of the marxists in Scotland is an important factor. The anti-poll tax struggle is potentially the most important class movement of the Thatcher government.
- 109 The failure of the Scottish Labour Party to support the non-payment strategy complicates the situation and will probably give a new lease of life to the Scottish Nationalists. In other struggles the role of the leadership was decisive in ensuring defeat. In the case of the poll tax, the enormous move-

ment of opposition welling up from below will not be easily defused. It is quite possible, notwithstanding the role of the leaders in Scotland and nationally, that the government can be beaten on this issue.

● 110 It will be events such as this and even bigger explosions in the future which will transform the consciousness of the British working class. Consciousness always lags behind events. Massive illusions in capitalism and in their reformist leaders still exist among the working class. These will not be shaken off in a day. Rather it will take huge struggles, defeats as well as victories, before the British working class decisively embark on the road to revolution.

● 111 Particularly in the recent period, the class struggle in the North has tended to move in tandem with events in Britain. However, the complication of the national issue has meant that in periods of retreat, the movement in the North has been pushed back further, at times seemingly submerged by sectarianism. And the reverse. The greater sharpness with which all issues are posed in an arena of life and death conflict, together with the greater privation, has meant that in periods of resurgence, the working class in the North have generally moved into the vanguard of struggle in terms of militancy and solidarity.

● 112 During the initial wave of industrial opposition to Thatcher after 1979, it was in the North that the first regional general strike took place. The North was the most militant area during the 1982 health strike. Early in 1988 the issue of health cuts emerged as a potential spark to rally the labour movement against the Tories. During the Day of Action on March 14th the biggest demonstration in Britain or Northern Ireland, took place in Belfast.

● 113 there has been no sustained generalised movement of the working class since 1982. In general the period since then has been one of setback, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

● 114 Despite the sectarian reaction of this period the industrial unity of the working class has remained intact. As predicted in advance by the marxists, the campaign by loyalist bigots to split the unions and set up an Ulster TUC, has floundered. No credit attaches to the trade union leaders in this. Rather than counter the poisonous ideas being put forward they hid under their desks. It was the instinctive solidarity of both Catholic and Protestant workers which kept the unions united.

● 115 Throughout this period there have been important strikes in which the solidarity and militancy of the class have been revealed. In the most recent period there has been a certain limited upturn in the tempo of the industrial movement. Busworkers, seafarers, Fordworkers, shop workers, post-officeworkers and of course health workers have all been out this year. These are a portent of what is to come.

● 116 A continuation of the boom in the world economy and in Britain, notwithstanding that its effects in the North would be very limited, could lead to an upsurge in militancy and promote new strikes. The boom in retailing has been an important factor in increasing the confidence of shopworkers, leading to a number of strikes. Further movements of this layer are likely particularly in the event of consumer spending continuing to grow for a period.

● 117 As in Britain, recent struggles have not become generalised. Generally speaking, it is only in exceptional periods of heightened class struggle that generalised movements take place, and then only for a limited period of time. After the defeat the miners, a period of recovery was inevitable before the heavy battalions of the class would move back into action. The present more 'normal' pattern of isolated industrial battles, involving in the main workers in the lighter industries, smaller workplaces, shops and the public sector, is a preparation for more generalised battles at a later stage.

● 118 In periods when the class struggles recedes the trade union tops tend to be drawn closer to the capitalist state. In the North the trade union leaders not only are up to their necks in government quangos and agencies, they also have more than a finger in the dish of state repression through their secret dealings with the RUC. Despite their verbal opposition, the NIC-ICTU leaders have swallowed the gospel of 'new realism' intact and in practice uphold and defend capitalism.

● 119 It is not just at the top that the process of incorporation into the state has taken place. Government funding of unemployment centres, and like projects, is deliberately designed to soften and corrupt a layer of ex-activists by giving them jobs and perks. The layer of ex-militants and ex-lefts who have taken these positions have, in practice, become a cushion for the trade union bureaucracy to rest on.

● 120 In the 1960s and early '70s there was a substantial layer of shop stewards and local representatives who were prepared to lead struggles. A new layer of militants came into activity during the anti-sectarian campaign of 1975-6. They very quickly succeeded in transforming the trades councils. It was because of the role of the shop stewards, and the key influence of the marxists, that the 1982 health strikes were conducted with such combativity and vigour.

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● 121 With notable exceptions such as Abbey Meats or in workplaces where the marxists have an influence, no such equivalent strata of activists now exists. Workers at local level have become more wary of initiating strikes knowing that they are harder to win and having no confidence in their union officials to develop the struggle. Many stewards have become tired and demoralised. Many of those who were leaders in the 1982 health strikes have been broken and no longer have the will to struggle. Other older militants have been corrupted and partially incorporated into the union bureaucracy. Trades councils are a reflection of these processes. In most cases they have been reduced to shells, incapable of conducting serious campaigns at this stage.

● 122 But within the factories and offices a new leadership is being prepared. In the course of the coming struggles, the older layer of disillusioned activists will tend to be pushed to the side. Fresher and younger forces will take their place. Hardened by difficult struggle, this new layer will provide fertile ground for the ideas of the marxists.

● 123 While generally at an early stage, this process is clearly underway in some unions. The two sections of NIPSA most bloodied in battle, the health service and DHSS, have both been pushed to the left. Each wave of struggle has produced new branch militants prepared to combat both the employers and their own right wing union leadership. It will be when the other sections of this union are forced on to the road of struggle that the hold of the right at the top will be loosened. As in NIPSA, so in other unions.

● 124 On the basis of big events the unions will be pushed to the left. This process will be protracted and uneven. It will take place sometimes in advance of, sometimes behind, but generally in line with the transformation of the unions in Britain.

● 125 Since the early 1970s the movements north and south have been drawn further apart. Sectarian reaction in the North has been compounded by the betrayals of the ICTU leaders in the South, especially by the signing of successive national wage agreements. So long as the class struggle appears to be in recess in the South, this tendency towards separation will be maintained. And the reverse — when big struggles take place in the South, the movement in the North will be positively affected. When workers move onto the offensive North and South, even though they may set out on different issues, the tendency will be towards greater unity.

● 126 The working class moves from the industrial front to the political front and back again. This will be a feature of the next period in Britain and in the South. In the North also workers will come to see the limitations of trade union struggle. Their instinct towards political action will bring the new activists thrown up in future struggles into headlong collision with the doctrine of 'pure' trade unionism preached by the NIC ICTU leaders. Despite the opposition of their leaders, the process of politicisation of the unions will be unstoppable.

● 127 It will be around the demand for the building of a labour party that this process will centre. Despite the poverty, despite the severity of the economic crisis of capitalism, the class will not move straight to the banner of socialist revolution. Huge illusions in reformism exist and are deeply embedded. The absence of a labour party means that workers have no direct experience of such a party and this reinforces, not reduces, illusions in the benefits of its creation, in the same way as the repressive methods of the state lead to illusions in bourgeois democracy.

● 128 For these reasons the mass of the class will have to go through the school of reformism before they will come to accept revolutionary conclusions. Only in the exceptional circumstance of the emergence of a mass revolutionary party in Britain and the South, prior to the creation of a labour party in the North, might it become possible to proceed immediately and directly to the building of a mass revolutionary party in the North.

● 129 Unlike the sects who stand on the sidelines, bloated with self-importance but starved of any influence, the marxists must participate in this process of politicisation alongside the working class. When the Knights of Labor organisation developed in America towards the end of the last century, Engels denounced those sectarians who turned marxism into a dogma and kept, "*aloof from any movement which did not accept that dogma.*" "*A million or two of working mens' votes next November for a bonafide working mens' party is worth infinitely more at present than a hundred thousand votes for a*

*doctrinally perfect platform.” “The first step, of importance for every country newly entering into the movement is always the constitution of the workers as an independent political party no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers party.... That the programme of the party is still confused and extremely deficient and that it has raised the banner of Henry George are unavoidable evils, but also merely transitory ones. The masses must have time and opportunity to develop, and they can have the opportunity only when they have a movement of their own - no matter in what form, so long as it is their movement - in which they are drawn further by their own mistakes and learn to profit by them.”*

● 130 The political traditions of the working class in the North is a labour tradition. Labour remains the traditional organisation of the class even though a labour Party does not now exist. However, the absence of such a party for a prolonged period has meant that this is a living tradition only among the older generations. For the youth and the new layers moving into struggle the tradition of labour will need to be recreated from scratch.

● 131 The sectarian political parties developed out of the defeat of labour and the prolonged absence of any class alternative. It does not follow however that they will simply melt away as soon as workers begin to move in the direction of their own political organisation. Having come into existence, the sectarian political forces are an obstacle to the creation of a labour party.

● 132 Sinn Fein was thrown up on the back of big events and it follows that it will likewise take big events, an explosive development of the class struggles over a period, before their political basis among the working class and the youth can largely be won to labour. It is less so in relation to the Unionists and the SDLP, but here also it will only be on the basis of big events that a labour party will emerge to largely displace them in the working class areas.

● 133 Another important obstacle is the role of the trade union leaders. They are not prepared to openly politicise their organisations. Instead they prefer to cower behind the pretence of ‘non-political trade unionism.’ Their argument that political involvement would split the unions is false through and through. It is their failure to provide an alternative which perpetuates the political division of the working class, and by so doing, poses a continual threat to trade union unity. In avoiding politics the union leaders are guided not by a consideration of what is best for the movement but by their bureaucratic instinct for self-preservation and a quiet life.

● 134 Other factors can complicate and temporarily throw back the development of a labour party. The role of the Labour leaders in Britain and in the South has, in the past, only served to depopularise the slogan of a labour party in the North.

● 135 The experience of a Kinnock led Labour Government would further alienate support for this idea. Labour’s Northern Ireland policy is an ill-thought-out and completely unworkable mish-mash of ideas. Its promise of eventual capitalist reunification will play into the hands of the Unionists. Labour would find itself unable to introduce any meaningful reforms. Its election would probably encourage the Provos to step up their campaign in the fallacious belief that a Labour government would withdraw. The security forces would demand more repression and the government would be forced to comply. Labour would take up from where the Tories left off.

● 136 The capitulation of the left of the Labour Party, notably Tony Benn, to nationalism is an added obstacle to socialism in the North. Should a left Labour government eventually come to power, armed with a programme of withdrawal, the reaction in the North would quickly force it to abandon this objective. Ironically, because of the sectarian turmoil the election of such a government would likely provoke, it would probably be forced into a policy of vicious repression in order to gain control by military means of the mess it had helped create.

● 137 Whereas developments to the left in the unions in Britain will encourage corresponding movements in the North, with the political arm of the movement, the equation is somewhat more complex. If the lefts who emerge to become leaders of the British Labour Party espouse the ideas of Benn they will only serve to alienate Protestant workers from socialism and generally sow confusion in the North.

● 138 This difficulty will only be finally overcome when the marxists emerge as a clearly visible pole of attraction within the British labour movement. The marxist slogans of class unity, of socialism in the North and the South as the only basis for unity, and of a socialist federation of Britain and Ireland on a free and voluntary basis, would gain an easy echo among both Protestant and Catholic workers. The power of these ideas would have an effect in redirecting the new generation of proletarian

lefts, as opposed to the present petty bourgeois layer, away from the dangerous nonsense of capitalist reunification. This makes the work of the marxists in Britain on this issue today extremely important for the revolution in Ireland and Britain.

● 139 The protracted nature of events has meant a delay in the emergence of a labour party. Setbacks have obscured the real processes of politicisation taking place. In this situation only the marxists have kept their heads.

● 140 There is no short cut to the building of a labour party. There is no substitute for the process of transforming the unions and moving them in a political direction. Various groups and individuals, impatient with the delay in the movement and inflated with their own sense of importance, have attempted to do so and have ended up with nothing. So three small labour groupings, the NILP, Newtownabbey Labour Party and the followers of Paddy Devlin decided some time ago to declare themselves a new labour party through the merging of their forces, and have succeeded only in creating an even smaller grouping - Labour 87.

● 141 Others, including in the recent period one or two trade union officials have raised the call for a region of the British Labour Party. Leaving aside the sectarian manner in which this has been raised, the idea is a non-starter. The British Labour Party leaders, just like the local union leaders, are fearful of the consequence of this step and will not take it.

● 142 Given the obstacles to be overcome the development of a labour party in the North will be a difficult process. It will not be built from the top, not by a few union leaders having a change of heart, not by the British Labour Party leaders — and not by their Irish Labour counterparts, for that matter.

● 143 It will only be built on the basis of big events. The existing political forces emerged from the struggles and defeats of the 1968-70 period, and, in the case of Sinn Féin, in the aftermath of the hunger strike of the 1980s. They are the only products of social convulsion. Likewise, a labour party will only grow into a mass political force capable of stripping away the working class support for these parties on the basis of an even greater social upheaval.

● 144 A perspective can map out only the general processes and then only in a qualified manner. The class struggle as it unfolds will inevitably be far richer and more varied. Thus it is not possible to determine now precisely how a labour party in the North will be built. Most likely it will take a movement from below producing a movement at the top at some stage. The new activists thrown up in the future battles will conclude from their experience that political action is necessary. At a certain point their pressure on the union leaders will tell. The leaders will have the choice — either respond to the politicisation of their ranks or else be bypassed. Some, at least, will have no option but to concede the demand for political action which for years, even decades, they have been resisting.

● 145 Timescale is even more difficult. The emergence of a labour party will be delayed for a further period because of the cowardice of the leaders and the lack of a strong rank and file opposition within the unions. It may be that it will be quite late in the revolutionary process before it is formed.

● 146 The evasion of the leadership means that the process of politicisation will be arduous and uneven. There will be confused ideas as to how to proceed. Some activists may move prematurely. There can be false starts. It is possible that a party will be established but not survive and that the class may have to move more than once to set it up before its foundations are firm enough to cut across the sectarian political division.

● 147 Given their relatively small forces, the marxists cannot substitute themselves and their experience for these events. The working class will have to learn for itself in struggle. But the intervention of the marxists with ideas and slogans which clearly articulate the otherwise only partially and sometimes confusedly expressed political instincts of the class, can speed the whole process.

● 148 The marxists must be prepared to campaign within the movement for an intervention in every election, to assist and co-ordinate the work of the trade union and community candidates who may stand in local areas in anticipation of a general movement, and, where tactically correct, to intervene directly in elections. This work if carried out with a sense of proportion will both establish a firmer base for marxism within the movement and the class, and will accelerate the overall struggle for a political voice.

● 149 Arising out of struggle, a mass labour party would be propelled in a left direction. It would be a party in ferment, a body in which the classic conditions for work in the mass reformist parties laid down by Trotsky in the 1930s would exist or quickly develop.

- 150 Out of the battle of ideas within this party, out of events which would expose in practice the limitations of reformism, and provided the marxists existed in sufficient force, the basis for a mass tendency of marxism could quite quickly be established.
- 151 It could be that the life of a labour party could be short. The longer its formation is delayed the more likely this would be. If formed only at a late stage in the revolution the majority of the party could quite quickly be won to marxist ideas or, if not, in the hands of the reformists, even the left reformists, its inability to cope with the demands of the national question could throw it back, even destroy it.
- 152 Whereas political and industrial developments in Britain will have a more immediate impact, especially in the short term, developments in the South also will have a profound effect. In this period of reaction the tendency has been for the movement North and South to draw apart. The reformist leaders in the South, by dissipating or restraining the struggles of the working class and by adopting a thoroughly bourgeois stance on the North, have reinforced sectarianism. Viewed from across the border, especially through the distorting gaze of the bourgeois media, there has appeared no force to challenge the view of a green Tory state.
- 153 In the future when the workers take to struggle North and South, the tendency will be to unity. Events in the South will confound the image of Southern society created by the bourgeois in the North and vice versa. The emergence of mass leftward moving labour parties North and South would re-establish the links which were being built between the two movements in the 1960s, but on a higher level. What precise organisational form this will take, and likewise the precise relationship Labour in Ireland will establish with the British labour movement, is a matter which history will decide.
- 154 Outside the development of a mass labour party, the political stalemate cannot be broken. The experience of the Alliance Party, probably soon to be absorbed into the 'Democrats', has proven the impossibility of any bourgeois party breaking down the sectarian voting.
- 155 While each sectarian block stands opposed to the other, the dialectic is that each feeds off and needs the other. The Unionists retain their hold on Protestant workers by scaremongering about the support for republicans and nationalists on the other side; the SDLP and Sinn Fein use the votes for the Unionists to present a view of Protestant workers as blinkered by sectarianism.
- 156 None of these parties can move away from their sectarian positions. They have a vested interest in maintaining sectarianism, because, should it disappear, their electoral base would go with it.
- 157 These parties in their present form are all products of the 'Troubles'. They developed because the class forces were thrown back. They continue to exist only because a clear alternative has not been created. Despite the cynical regard in which they are held by workers, they, or parties like them, will exist until such times as a class party emerges.
- 158 Only a trade union based labour party can unite the mass of workers. The stalinist Workers Party has no trade union links and, because of its paramilitary origins and nature, is incapable of developing any. The future political developments of the working class will pass it by.
- 159 Such support as this party has is confined to the Catholic community. Its grovelling opportunism will never win a base among the mass of Protestant workers. At best it cannot go much beyond the 2-3% of the vote it now gets.
- 160 Early in the Troubles, when it was the Republican Clubs/Official IRA, it was radicalised by an influx of Catholic youth and pushed briefly to a centrist position. Since then its ranks have shrunk to the most rotten, most opportunistic layer. These "opportunists with guns" stand on the right of the movement and will consciously attempt to prevent the development of the genuine ideas of marxism in the future.
- 161 The Communist Party are a rump. They have lost most of their genuine base in the workplaces. Their youth organisation is defunct. Yet they are a rump with certain influence. Instead of rank and file positions they hold posts in the trade union bureaucracy. They have also gained a layer of trendies involved in various voluntary organisations. Not least, they can retain an apparatus, not on the basis of membership, but because of money from the stalinist bureaucracies in the east.
- 162 The only thing they will create on this basis is trouble for themselves. Workers moving into struggle will come into collision with the stalinist trade union bureaucrats who are indistinguishable in every respect from the rest. They will come to rue the day their ranks were flooded with trendies as their organisation will be poisoned by the influence of this petty bourgeois layer. All that the Moscow



gold will do is allow a bureaucratic and degenerate crust to consolidate at the head of this tiny organisation.

● 163 All this, together with the growing crisis of the stalinist states, especially when Gorbachev's 'reforms' are seen to have failed, is a sure recipe for paralysis and splits. Provided the work of the marxists is carried out properly, especially among the youth, the Communist Party will remain a sect with no real influence among genuine layers of the class.

● 164 The puny ultra-left sects are in a state of paralysis and crisis. No doubt as one such group disappears, another even more quixotic version of itself will reappear. These groups have no understanding of processes, of methods or of slogans. Northern Ireland is a rigorous testing ground for all political organisations. In such a situation, the sects are organically incapable of building anything serious.

● 165 Despite the generally hostile environment of the last few years, the marxists have been able to consolidate their forces and build. This achievement should be a matter of pride and encouragement for the marxists in Ireland and internationally. It has been possible first and foremost because of a serious attitude to theory. A firm and resolute approach to all organisational matters has also been essential.

● 166 The objective situation is still difficult and may even deteriorate in the short term. However, it is a contradictory situation. Despite the sectarian violence, the class issues are never far from the surface. Important industrial struggles have taken place and are likely even in the short term. An explosive mood is developing, especially among the youth.

● 167 Even now there are good opportunities to develop the influence of the marxists. In the industrial field very important gains can be made among both male and female workers in a number of unions. Where the basis exists, active and campaigning broad lefts can be built. The best of those involved in these organisations can be won to the marxists. The work of each supporter in the trade unions must be carried out in a revolutionary manner. In this way the influence of the stalinists at rank and file level can be quickly surpassed and the marxists can emerge as the clearly seen opposition to the bureaucracy throughout the movement.

● 168 Major gains are possible in the youth field. In this area of work audacity is the key. Bold campaigning youth work will pay dividends, bringing groups of young workers, male and female, school students and third level students to the banner of Marxism.

● 169 This work is a preparation for the major struggles of the future. At some stage, the movement will return to the traditions of 1907, 1919 and 1932. The ability of the marxists to intervene in and play a leading role in these events depends on the work of developing cadres being successfully carried out in periods such as now.

● 170 In the words of Lenin, every supporter won to the ideas of marxism in an unfavourable period is worth a hundred or a thousand when objective conditions change. If new supporters can be won and then educated and consolidated in the ideas and methods, the basis will be laid for a future mass tendency of marxism.

ends.

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**Author:** Peter Hadden

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