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THE COALITION AND THE S.D.L.P. BACK DOWN BEFORE LOYALISTS, BUT...

OPPOSITION EXISTS LET IT'S VOICE BE HEARD!

Since the Convention Election; and its predictable result, the machinery of the Loyalist takeover has moved relentlessly on. We have seen the rise in assassinations of Catholics, increased harassment and the 'No Surrender' and 'Back to Stormont' speeches from Loyalist leaders. We know what the next step must mean for the anti-Unionist population, any resistance to the return of Stormont and the R.U.C. will be met with the most brutal pogroms that the Catholic community has yet suffered in this phase of the struggle.

Some sections of the community in the North have begun to realise this, and to make preparations for their defense. But a key factor in the strength of the defense, will be, as it always has been, the reaction among the working class in the 26 counties and the position that the southern government will take up.

'hidden censorship' of the media and are now using the criminal jurisdiction bill as the principle focus of their attack on both militants who are on the run from the North and any who oppose the government's aims in the south. They are attempting to ensure, through this increasing repression, that the resistance both north and south will be minimal.

Opposition exists let us extend it!

The response in the 26 counties to this position is already creating a crisis for the southern politicians, Fianna Fail has been forced into using republican rhetoric — the Labour Party is showing signs of strain and possible splits, pushed by the pressure from sections of their rank and file.

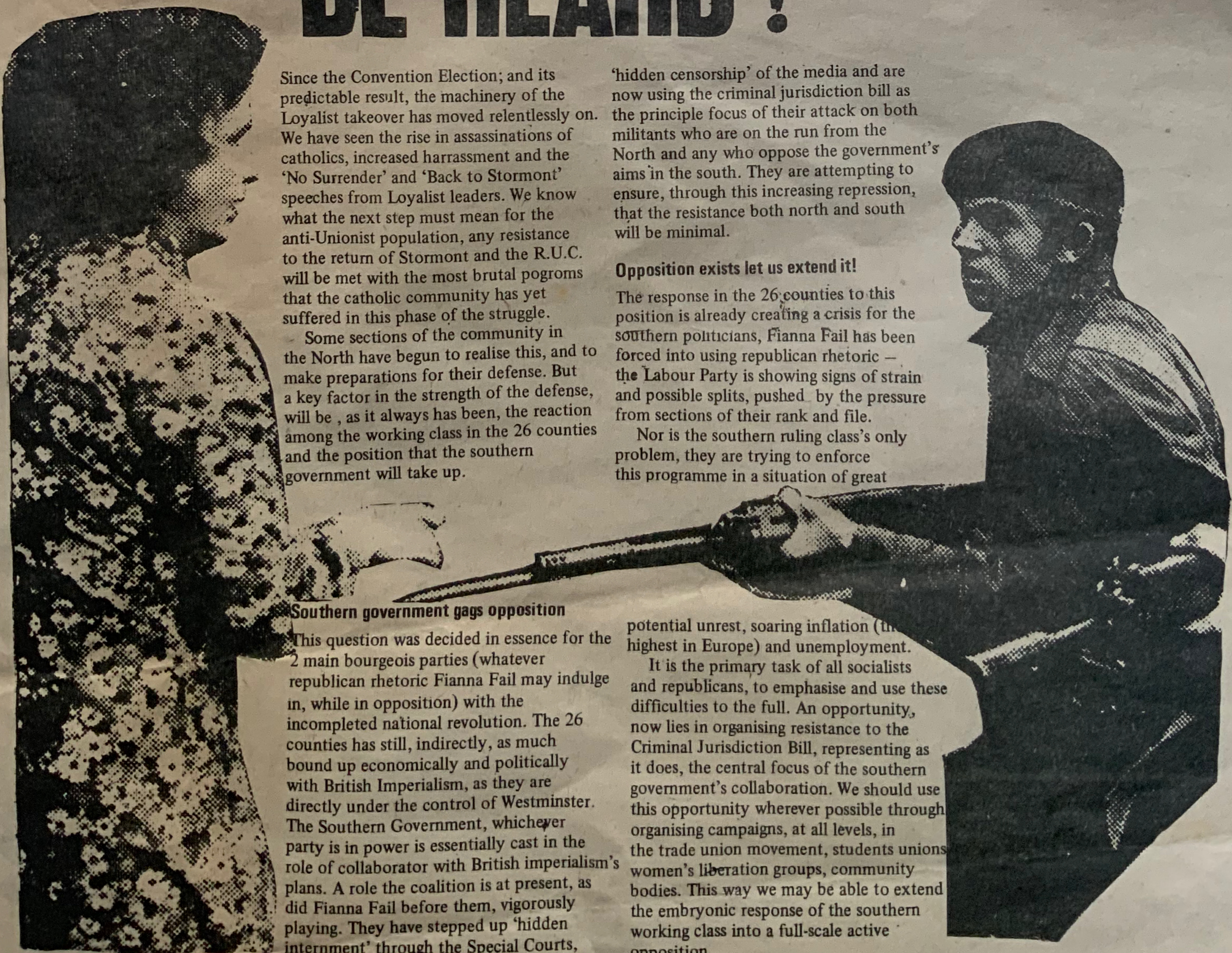
Nor is the southern ruling class's only problem, they are trying to enforce this programme in a situation of great

Southern government gags opposition

This question was decided in essence for the 2 main bourgeois parties (whatever republican rhetoric Fianna Fail may indulge in, while in opposition) with the incompleting national revolution. The 26 counties has still, indirectly, as much bound up economically and politically with British Imperialism, as they are directly under the control of Westminster. The Southern Government, whichever party is in power is essentially cast in the role of collaborator with British imperialism's plans. A role the coalition is at present, as did Fianna Fail before them, vigorously playing. They have stepped up 'hidden internment' through the Special Courts,

potential unrest, soaring inflation (the highest in Europe) and unemployment.

It is the primary task of all socialists and republicans, to emphasise and use these difficulties to the full. An opportunity, now lies in organising resistance to the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill, representing as it does, the central focus of the southern government's collaboration. We should use this opportunity wherever possible through organising campaigns, at all levels, in the trade union movement, students unions women's liberation groups, community bodies. This way we may be able to extend the embryonic response of the southern working class into a full-scale active opposition.



T.C.D. elections

LEFT FAILS TO GIVE LEADERSHIP

This year's student union elections in Trinity College were marked by a massive swing to the right with an organised Fine Gael bloc winning three of the four sabbatical positions, including the presidency. This is the first time in five years that a non-"left" candidate has won this position. It is not enough to measure this defeat in terms of the superior organisation of the right (which is the reason given by the defeated candidates) we must examine why students felt that the programs offered by the left candidates gave them no way forward. For only the existence of such a political vacuum could have produced the above results.

The Broad Left Front was formed to contest the election on a very minimum program of reform within the university and originally consisted of a member of the LWR, a left-liberal and the members of the Trinity Republican Club. Although the latter later withdrew from the front they agreed not to run against the other broad front candidates for President and Vice-President, but to "take" education officer and treasurer. The remnants of the Broad Left Front produced a manifesto which put forward their demands directly relating to the university itself without seeing that university in the context of society as a whole. This meant that a lot of the differences between them and Fine Gael's Radical Student Group (Sic) became blurred. For instance both groups emphasised the high catering prices and rent in Trinity but the Broad Left Front failed to cite this within the context of the crisis in the southern economy and the attacks on students through massive cuts in expenditure because students are a heterogeneous and largely middle class stratum of society it is not enough merely to appeal to them on the level of their economic hardships. Students are radicalising around socialist ideas and student elections are an excellent place to

explain these ideas to larger numbers of them in a clear and consistent way. The LWR candidate for President, Carol Coulter, said that this could not be done as yet because the first thing was to strengthen the new student union. But the only way the union can be strengthened is not by blurring differences between left and right candidates for election but by polarising them on a clear political basis. Too often right wing candidates stand just as "personalities". If the left responds by doing the same then the election of a left candidate is no real victory.

The other 'left' candidate the Maoist Democratic Student Front mounted no real campaign although their literature did give a comprehensive political analysis of Irish society. Here the failure was that of being unable to relate these political ideas in any real way to the realities facing the student both inside and outside the walls of Trinity. Their failure to see the student movement as having any kind of dynamic of its own, can be seen in the presidency of David Vipond last year. To say, as Carol Coulter did, that he did nothing pure and simple is to couch the problem incorrectly in the character/laziness of David Vipond. On the contrary it is the CPI-MLs perspective of the student body as an adjunct to Maoist politics which has led them to wrongly evaluate how students can be mobilised and won politically. They have thus lost complete contact with the reality of the situation.

In the last analysis there is no short cut for winning students to socialism. We must not only put forward socialist ideas in a concise agitational form (i.e. with the aim of explaining the basic concepts behind them to a large number of students) but we must also criticise both the manipulatory form and content of student politics. We should therefore see the presidency of a student's union not as an end in itself but as a means of initiating a rethink about the whole present concept of political representation (i.e. by the annual or four yearly vote). Thus, although the Broad Left candidates criticised the USI

bureaucracy they did not differentiate themselves from the methods used by that bureaucracy to get elected. They thus became part of the Official Sinn Fein tradition of "silent socialism" keeping many of their ideas out of sight until after election day. Such manoeuvres are a reflection of the corrupt basis of today's political power structure which depends for its existence on the passivity of the majority of the members of society. They have no place in the struggle for a socialist form of political praxis.

Yet it seems strange perhaps that the League for a Workers Republic, who are never slow to attack their opponents for "opportunism or reformism", should themselves be a party to an electoral campaign which was totally reformist and opportunist in content. In the opening paragraph to Coulter's election manifesto it is stated: "Our manifesto is based on what we believe to be essential in order to preserve what few gains have been made in the educational system and to make further gains possible".

Apparently socialist politics and their presentation to students are to be sacrificed on this scanty altar! It has always been the policy of those social democrats, stalinists etc., whom the LWR so vociferously denounce, to do just that i.e. to totally abstract certain gains from their overall context. Such politics are the essence of opportunism. The question of the oppression of women is totally ignored in the 'Broad Left' program and even the denial of basic civil rights (such as contraception, equal pay) are ignored. In fact, Ms Coulter goes so far as to term herself "Chairman of the Young Socialists in Trinity".

The elections were a total disaster for the Trinity Left, not (as might seem the obvious reason) because of its electoral defeat but because the political consciousness of the student body was not raised one iota by the campaign around them. The issue for socialists in elections is clear; to put forward principled socialist politics or bow under the pressure of opportunist student isolationism.

BETTY PURCELL



RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

CONTINUED

2) The SDLP has retained its hegemony of the catholic community. Both factors emphasise the necessity of the anti-imperialist movement to develop policies and initiatives which expose and outflank the SDLP and involve increasing layers of the working class in building opposition to a loyalist take over.

In the boycott the Provisionals stressed the likelihood of a takeover. Since then the Provisional IRA has warned that it would not tolerate the re-emergence of a loyalist supremacist regime, in whatever guise it might be presented.

The Provisionals consolidated support with their boycott and the political recognition of the loyalist threat, but it will only be with policies for the active involvement of the working class that such a consolidation of vanguard elements can be extended to a broadening of anti-imperialist layers.

FIANNA FAIL CONTD.

within the party's rank and file. They represent a wing of the Southern ruling class which while not directly dependent on British capital, does not have any independent existence apart from British Imperialism e.g. building industry, some managerial and professional sectors etc. Thus while this wing is pro-imperialist it will fight for some bargaining space in order to achieve a better deal from British Imperialism.

Changed situation helps Haughey

Two things have brought about the reemergence of the Haughey-Blaney wing at this time, in spite of their defeat in 1970. Firstly the situation in the North has worsened considerably since the days of the Arms Trial in 1970. The Catholic community has been battered by wave after wave

The present period is one in which elitist concepts of posing action in terms of being carried out by individual organisations in opposition to united action by as many anti-imperialist groups as possible with the widest mass participation is particularly dangerous. And the continuation of political sectarianism and rivalries within the anti-imperialist movement is directly contradictory to the need to break out of isolation.

These are two tendencies which must be overcome if the anti-imperialist movement is to rise to the needs of the anti-unionist working class.

Ours tasks now

A programme of united action by anti-imperialist groups in demonstrations on the streets and in meetings in the catholic ghettos of the North around the question of the loyalist takeover and specifically opposing preparations for a loyalist

of sectarian assassinations, the situation is now being cleared for a take-over by the forces of Loyalism. Such a takeover will have enormous implications for the situation in the south. People in the south may have been lulled into inactivity over the past few years but they have not given any government a mandate to actively collaborate in the destruction of the northern minority. Republicanism is still a strong instinct among the working class and small farmers in the south. The strategy adopted by Lynch and Cosgrave of conciliation towards the forces of Loyalism along with measures of repression against republicans will have been proven to be both a wrong and a disastrous policy.

This situation provides the opportunity that Haughey has long awaited, his hour of vindication

power structure, such as the RUC, UDR and the continuing presence of the British Army, would be a central thrust towards involving broader layers of the working class.

And a central aim should also be for the development of organs of mass defence within the catholic areas against the continuing anti-catholic murder campaigns of the loyalist paramilitaries and in preparation for the possibility of more generalised attacks on the ghettos.

Anti-imperialist organisations must also attempt to break the isolation of the Northern catholic working class with the development of campaigns in the 26 counties against the collaboration with British imperialism of the Leinster House regime and in support of the National struggle.

These are actions which should be carried out

not in a number of weak voices but in a strong united front posing the possibility of building real resistance to repression.

The results of the Convention election can lead to no other conclusion than that repression against the catholic working class will increase. The UUUC's Kennedy Lindsay has already ominously predicted a scenario for the next few months; that if the British state forces do not increase activity against the catholic population - "ruthless killer gangs will emerge on the Loyalist side, and even within the military security forces, as they have done before".

LAVERY
Belfast R.M.G.

will have come. Secondly, the election of a Coalition government in 1973 had a big effect on Fianna Fail, being the first it was removed from government since the 1950s. For a monolithic organisation like Fianna Fail to survive it must be in a strong position in relation to political power - otherwise its complex network of patronage will suffer a sharp decline, sectors of support among the business and farming community will be won away from it etc. Fianna Fail lies close to such a dilemma. Haughey is posing himself in this instance as the saviour of Fianna Fail. The Haughey wing realises that the national question can be used in order to drive a wedge into the coalition which could easily dislodge it from government. Already Cosgrave and O'Brien are flexing their muscles for such a confrontation. The "unity" of the Labour Party has been shown to be totally lacking on the question of the Criminal Justice Jurisdiction Bill.

Fianna Fail and the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill

It is the conjuncture of these two circumstances which paves the way for the re-emergence of Republican demagoguery in Fianna Fail. The Criminal Justice Jurisdiction Bill provides an excellent battleground upon which Fianna Fail can confront the Coalition. It is the first real breach of the Bi-Partisan approach formerly adopted by government and opposition in the Dail. The Criminal Justice Jurisdiction is the very height of repression legislation because it involves the southern government accepting totally the machinations of the Northern courts and judicial system regardless of the presence of Internment, R.U.C. etc. Under the Sunningdale Agreement it was the last part of the package i.e. it would

exist alongside a power-sharing executive and a council of Ireland, reformed R.U.C. etc. In its present form it can only be seen as a further instrument of repression against the Northern minority. Opposition to this Bill is not something which can be left to Fianna Fail. It should be used by anti-imperialists as an important lever against collaboration with Loyalism. Inactivity on this issue can have fatal consequences. In the event of an anti-imperialist upsurge in the south the role of a Haugheyite Fianna Fail would be to divert the masses away from the anti-capitalist dynamic of the struggle into a nationalist deadend. As such the new Fianna Fail would become a dangerous force indeed. It must be said that the present politics of the Provisional Republican Movement leaves them ill-equipped to face such an eventuality. Their inability to understand the socialist dynamic of the national question would naturally leave them open to be either utilised or swept aside by a "Republican" Fianna Fail. Thus the need to understand the politics of Haughey and to ruthlessly expose the trend he represents will be a crucial necessity in the future. The challenge of the Criminal Justice Jurisdiction must also be met with united action by all anti-imperialists. The Irish Revolution is entering its most decisive stage, in the south the fight against collaborationism in defence of the Northern minority will be an important part of the struggle against defeat of that revolution. A correct evaluation of the dynamic of that struggle and of the danger of Haugheyism is essential if the struggle is not to be defeated again for another period.

RORY MAC NEILL



THE DYNAMICS OF THE LOYALIST TAKE-OVER

Since the UWC strike the Loyalists have concentrated primarily on strengthening their hold at every level possible, gaining momentum from every concession yielded from Britain. Since the cease-fire this has developed into a gallop.

They are attempting to win back what local control in government they had, and in practice they have succeeded in certain areas. They have maintained and increased their hold over the RUC what remains now is tight political control generalised through Stormont. They are dealing with every social issue that arises, and are the most vociferous elements as regards housing, unemployment, local government etc. Every issue with the potential for working class action - from the ring-road and redevelopment to unemployment - they smother with demagogic sectarian 'solutions'. (This of course contradicts the Stickies whole conception of protestant working class). Their aim is to present themselves in the grand old manner of Orangeism, with this difference - that they be seen to be the only party capable of acting in the interests of the Protestant working class as workers, thus undercutting all the 'moderates' propaganda about social improvement through co-operation. Their work at local level is much more democratically controlled than before '68. Their power base is the U.D.A. with their control over recreation and community work (including housing), spiced up by the harsher methods of the U.V.F. etc. The question is not if and how they will take power, but WHEN Britain will politically institutionalise the existing situation.

At the same time, their emergence as the dynamic force in Irish politics has brought to the fore their own internal differences. While not pretending to understand all the internal manoeuvres, in general their differences rest on the basic contradiction of Orangeism, reinforced by the economic crisis, and different specific power-bases, social bases and attachments within the Loyalist coalitions e.g. Craig and most of the Vanguard and the U.D.A. compared with Paisley and all the D.U.P. and U.V.F. lies originally in the differing social compositions, and original functions of these organisations (plus the differing ideologies). One is a genuine mass organisation and the other is an elite. One has to contend with developments which affect the working class as a whole, the other is specifically designed to smash the working-class as a whole, thus the links with the National Front. The UWC has been refined by the U.V.F. and the politicians - it and other creature organisations like the East Antrim Workers Council are a genuine strike-breaking force e.g. during the milk strike, with special responsibility for smashing the T.U. structure.

The spectacular restructuring of the U.D.A. since the U.W.C. strike - necessary to transform it from a defensive organisation into an offensive organisation - has led to the removal of its founders and leaders and a new 'hardline' leadership. The 'Old Guard' were vigorously attacked by assassination groups operating from within the U.D.A. for their ambiguities towards republicanism, and their unwillingness to swing into direct action against them and Britain. The crunch came with the first ceasefire attempts on the life of Harding-Smith and the cessation of West Belfast ended with the emigration of Harding-Smith and the return of West Belfast. The new U.D.A. has been at pains to assert its independence, and to show itself as a dual-purpose organisation. On the one hand its 'respectability' in local community work ensuring the cohesion and strengthening of its mass base; on the other its 'fighting spirit' to contain the militant sectarianism within its ranks. When necessary these two merge e.g. the U.D.A. street patrols instead of the R.U.C. In this light should be seen their feud with the U.V.F. Accusations of communism and republicanism in themselves ridiculous, serve as warnings to the Protestant working class but more importantly are evidence of debate concerning the nature of Loyalist rule in future and how to achieve it. The U.D.A. are in the process of implementing a strategy of sorts,

which in their eyes leaves little room for the U.V.F. though in the eyes of most Loyalist politicians both can be accommodated if they can be controlled. After the U.W.C. strike the UDA lost considerable ground to the U.V.F. who for a while exerted a major influence over the U.W.C. itself. This period was marked by a series of disagreements between the two, while the feud itself has coincided with the restructuring of the U.D.A. (and its re-emergence).

Divisions are not confined to the paramilitaries; while specific divisions exist here, it has repercussions on and exacerbates already existing differences in the UUUC. The key factor is that the U.D.A. has established a certain amount of independence which is an anathema to the bulk of the UUUC politicians, particularly the Official Unionists. The major political difference in the UUUC is between those who advocate a return to Stormont and those who prefer a step towards integration. The former has in the past gone side by side with hints of U.D.I. and is represented by Vanguard and the U.D.A. The latter idea is backed in its totality by the D.U.P. and U.V.F. (and National Front in Britain) and in a diluted version by the Official Unionists. The latter election manifesto in the Westminster elections demanded local government powers and increased representation. The new UUUC manifesto includes this as part of a new Stormont, and thereby orientating towards Vanguard and the U.D.A. and reflecting the balance of forces within Loyalism as a whole.

The threat of economic sanctions - far more likely than - far more likely than physical force is unlikely to make much impact on the latter who are quite prepared to look for alternative sources e.g. Libyan trips. They will be used during the convention not to back power-sharing, but to try to prevent a Stormont. The result in an already poor economic climate is likely to make the protestant working class more hardline than ever. In any case both solutions would involve the disintegration of the SDLP and a massive defeat of the anti-unionist working class. FAR more likely is the prospect of wide-spread civil war.

The changes in Loyalism since the UWC strike have led to staged and unstaged confrontations between the politicians and their power-base, with the latter demanding a greater share of the spoils. These charades should not be misunderstood - they do not simply represent plebians vs politicians - but an overall struggle to eliminate obstructions and to win organisational hegemony over the entire protestant working class as shown by the Ulster Loyalist Co-ordinating Council (Committee?) and its chairman Glen Barr. This dominance should not be underestimated. The protestant bourgeoisie of course are using the economic crisis for their own benefit (economics are immediately transformed into politics). In this situation without their backing no group of protestant workers or mixed workers will be able to win even the slightest concession without material support from anti-imperialist forces. The unskilled protestant workers will undoubtedly co-operate with their catholic counterparts e.g. the milk strike, but will be crushed by the might of the skilled protestant working class and farmers organised around the U.D.A. and Vanguard.

To ensure in future their control of Catholic areas and their present control of Protestant ones, they have a large amount of control over the RUC as shown by the U.D.A. street patrols and their leak of the arms documents shows and their success in silencing Rees etc. over this. Like Britain their policy has been one of strengthening the R.U.C. and the reserves, not only on the political but on the economic front e.g. the collaboration of the R.U.C. with Vanguard and the farmers during the milk strike. (When we speak of the farmers we mean the U.F.U. - the R.U.C.'s attitude towards the Farmers Action

Group contrasts sharply). Within Britain they have been forging links, of which the most recent is Molyneux's Monday Club - a counterpart to the U.V.F.'s N.F. link - and of course they have Powell. The question arises, how will they proceed to take control? and, how far is the British government prepared to give them control? and what sort of control?

The economics of loyalist takeover

All public services used to be functions of Stormont under Orange control, operated centrally and locally through loyalist dominated councils. Next

to employment housing was the most important lever used to tie the Prod W.C. to Orangeism (within the statelet), by utilising the existing ghettos, creating new ones, stimulating shortages, hence providing the atmosphere for discrimination and sectarianism. Within a colonial status it is this which is primarily responsible for the present atrocious conditions and shortages... while part of the British capitalist housing crisis, its intensity and political importance stems from the structure of the 6 Co. statelet.

The creation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (N.I.H.E.) - like the abolition of local government prerogatives and tied closely to that - was designed not to solve the housing crisis but to remove it from the sphere of politics. The demand for a points system and a neutral authority was seen by the SDLP in democratic

THE CONVENTION RE

Illusions that a power sharing structure reconciling the needs of the unionists with those of the catholic population could be constructed in the north received a clarifying jolt with the outcome of the Convention elections.

It is a jolt which must throw the political direction of the SDLP into crisis, but the election results also place a question mark over the ability of the anti-imperialist movement's ability to take advantage of this disarray.

The slight shifts in the overall voting pattern since the October Westminster election are deceptive. This shows the UUUC to have dropped from 38 per cent to 54 per cent, while the anti-unionist vote, SDLP and Republican Clubs primarily, actually rose from 23.3 per cent to 25 per cent, and the centre parties, Alliance and UPNI rose to 17.5 per cent.

But the rise in the moderate unionist vote is due simply to the campaigns of both the UPNI and Alliance extending to cover all constituencies for the first time, plus a strengthened vote in the middle class South Belfast and North Down constituencies. A closer analysis of the votes shows that the UUUC has not lost ground but has strengthened its position.

In particular this is signified by the departure of Brian Faulkner's UPNI from the ranks of the parties laying claim to represent the continuation of the mainstream unionist tradition. A comparison of the UPNI votes in the three constituencies it has contested in earlier elections is indicative of this collapse. From October the UPNI votes in South Belfast and North Down remained steady. In South Belfast the Faulknerite candidate actually gained slightly to exceed 5,000 votes, but this compares with over 18,000 cast in February. Similarly in North Down, the then Faulknerite Roy Bradford gained 21,000 in February but in October and in the Convention the UPNI could barely take 2,000 votes.

And in the third constituency, the loyalist heartland of East Belfast, the "moderate" unionist vote, plummeted from Stanley McMaster's 21,000 in February last year, to Peter McLachlan's 14,417 in October to just under 6,000 for Cardwell this time round. Significantly, the taint of Faulknerism led to the ignominious failure of recent convert to the UUUC, Roy Bradford, who was unable to reach the quota.

Despite the most organised and geographically wide campaign mounted by the unionist moderates, UPNI and Alliance, the UUUC vote remained 3 per cent up on that of its landslide 11 seat victory in February last year. That victory gave the loyalists the confidence to move forward to the UWC strike and the smashing of Sunningdale. This election, with the holding firm of the UUUC vote and the collapse of the Faulknerites is an indication that there has been no erosion of opposition to concepts of power sharing within the protestant community.

And at the same time the Independent Loyalist Hugh Smyth, well known to be aligned to the UVF polled a percentage of the vote only 1.5 per cent down on the UVF's Ken Gibson in October. This, in line with a 1 per cent drop in the UUUC East Belfast Vote, can be taken to signify a continuing base of support for the paramilitaries, though the extent to which the unprecedented UVF personation campaign affected this vote cannot be estimated.

While the centre moderate parties increased their percentage of the overall poll, the transfer votes clearly show they have made no inroads on loyalist support. Interchange of votes took place almost exclusively between the UPNI and Alliance and the SDLP and Alliance. This not

only indicates the relative strength of Alliance in relation to the UPNI, the latter being cut off from loyalist transfers while Alliance draws from both the UPNI and SDLP, but the isolation of the moderates from the loyalist majority, and also the integration of the SDLP into the unionist political structure.

What now for SDLP?

For the SDLP the Convention election was a traumatic experience. The Party can take some consolation that its overall vote was 2,000 more than in October. The SDLP's share of the poll was, at 23.7 per cent, the largest yet achieved, comparing with 20 per cent in October, 23 per cent in February last year and 22 per cent in the 1973 Assembly Elections.

It is an overall vote boosted by the addition of 21,000 votes from Fermanagh and South Tyrone, not contested since February when the Party gained 15,500 against opposition from Frank McManus and marginal increases in South Belfast, North Down and despite drops in all other constituencies.

The vote indicates that the SDLP has retained its mass base of support within the catholic community.

This is not to say that the Provisional boycott campaign did not damage the SDLP vote. It did, and that it did so very demonstrably in West Belfast has restored a great deal of confidence within broad elements of the vanguard in the North.

But it would be dangerous to take too superficial a view of the drop in SDLP votes in some areas and to assume that major gains are being made in breaking the credibility of the SDLP.

The drop from 21,821 votes in West Belfast in October, the highest vote achieved by the SDLP in the constituency, to 13,527 first preferences on May 1 must be examined closely. The latest vote is almost identical with that achieved by the Party in the Assembly.

At the same time the SDLP achieved its highest poll in October without anti-imperialist opposition outside the anti-imperialist candidates. At the Convention it is evident that the bulk of the 2,052 first preferences polled by Tom Conaty were from former SDLP voters. With the distribution of his votes following his elimination, 70.8 per cent went to the remaining SDLP candidates Hendron, Gillespie and O'Hare.

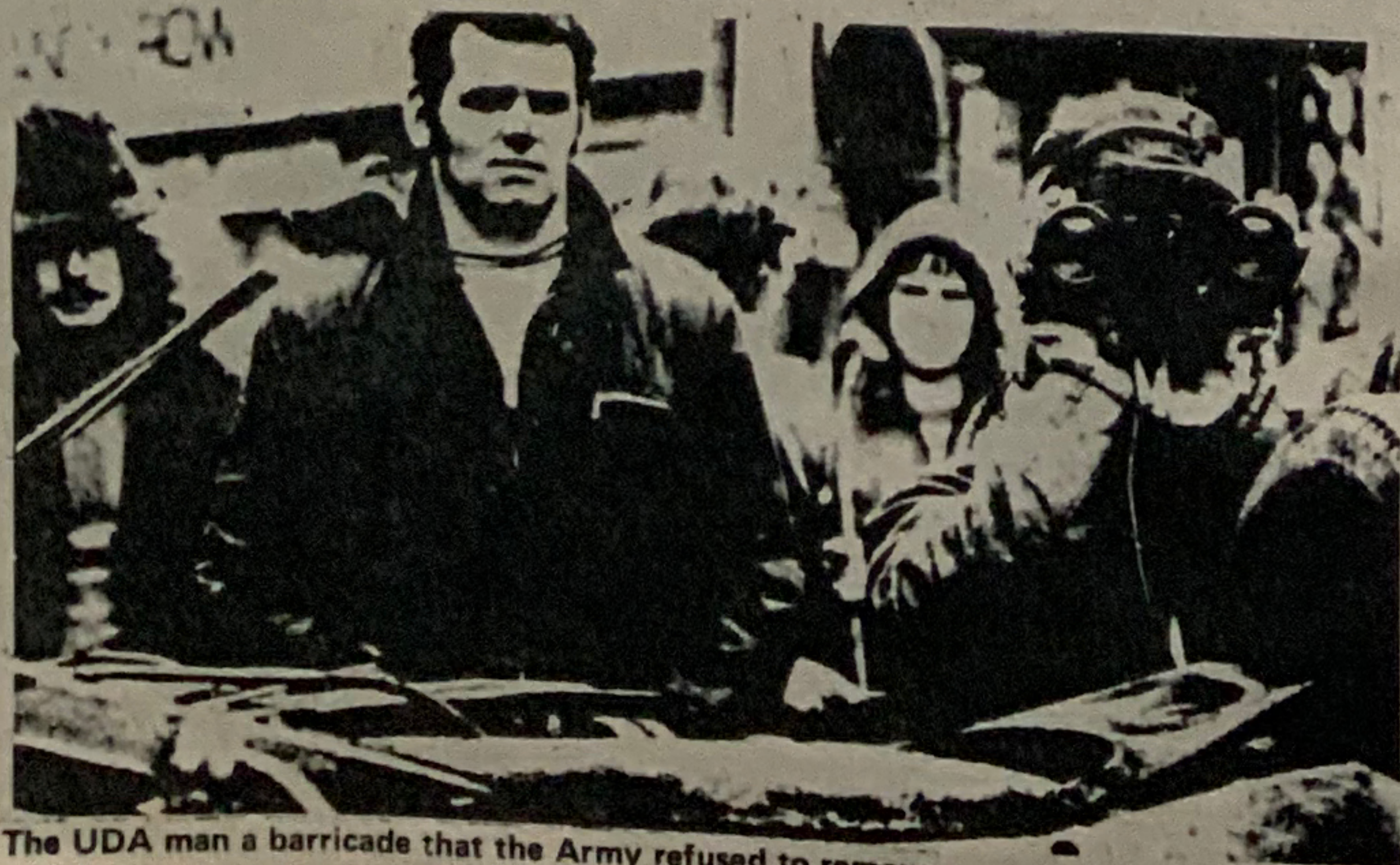
Thus the shifting of votes to another candidate representing a similar, if more traditional, brand of catholic middle class politics represents disillusionment with the SDLP, fragmentation within catholic middle class politics and the crisis of the SDLP itself, but not a strengthening of the anti-imperialist movement.

In any estimation of the effects of the boycott campaign on the SDLP vote this fragmentation must be taken into account and not only must a sizeable proportion of Conaty's vote must be subtracted from the SDLP deficit from October for this. Also it must be remembered that as much as Conaty benefitted from middle class disillusionment with the SDLP there would inevitably be a greater proportion expressed in apathy and a failure to vote from lack of interest rather than positive support for the boycott campaign.

These factors must account for several thousands of the SDLP vote drop.

Effects of boycott

But there can be little doubt that the boycott campaign was a key factor in reducing the total anti-unionist poll in West Belfast from 25,500 in October to just under 17,000. But these "missing" 8,500 votes must be looked at in the context of previous anti-imperialist electoral interventions. In February last year Albert Price polled 5,602 votes, despite being without the open support of



The UDA man a barricade that the Army refused to remove

terms, the actual crisis not being an issue. The SDLP fitted it into their scenario of power sharing, intending to partly control it. With the collapse of power sharing the N.I.H.E. is under increasing attack from Loyalists using the issue to complete their take-over of local government. They have built a network of tenant associations to reorganise their base within the Prod W.C. The S.D.L.P. still cling fervently to their concept of the N.I.H.E. despite the fact that it is now under the thumb of a Loyalist responsible for the Executive's vindictiveness towards the rent and rates strikers. As Britain shows more signs of leaving the 6 cos. to Loyalism, proportionally the SDLP stick closer to what is left. But imperialism permeates all structures in the 6 cos. and when they start handing over to Loyalism, housing does not remain neutral. On the least form of takeover (local government and increased representation) housing must fall and under local government control. This will be done by making the N.I.H.E. an integral part of local government structure with its reps. in various areas acting as servants of local councils. Hence the SDLP attitude is fundamentally wrong because it treats housing separately and not as part of the trend of events to Loyalist control. More importantly the removal of housing from sectarian control to direct imperialist control could not possibly have produced a qualitative improvement, just as direct control and a civil service orientated towards advance factories etc. could not possibly have produced a qualitative



improvement in employment. The N.I.H.E. is totally at the mercy of finance capital and has had to choose between a programme of house building on a mass scale or a policy of house improvement. It has chosen the latter with the proviso that it is incapable of tackling landlordship and private ownership. It is integrated into the overall

colonial improvement policy — roads, removal of obstacles like ghettos, advance factories, easy terms for imperialist investment — designed to streamline capitalism in the 6 cos. and utilise unemployment and a divided workforce much more effectively than was possible under Stormont. This process was quickened by the abolition of

Stormont — the major obstacle because the Loyalists power base made it impossible to launch an open attack on the Prod. W.C. In the same way the utilisation of the Finance Corporation under Stormont (Faulkners) was sectarian and unable to take full advantage West of the Bann. In this situation the role of the N.I.H.E. has been to find alternative accommodation for those from ghettos destroyed by roads and planning. In Belfast the planner chief aim was the Urban Motorway which involved the removal of the Short Strand, Markets, part of the Lower Falls, York St., Corporation St. While the plan itself has been shelved, its effects continue with scenes of devastation throughout Belfast.

It is therefore obvious that the S.D.L.P.'s conception of the N.I.H.E. as independent fails to see the issue as part of imperialism's integrated strategy for the 6 cos. and Irish capitalism as geared towards the EEC. They do this because they see Imperialism as independent and neutral.

Flowing from this is the complete dependence of the N.I.H.E. on finance capital and the enormous interest payments that consume most of its income. Along with political needs, this factor lay behind the heavy penalising of the rent strikers. The key point here is that it doesn't matter whether the tenants pay up or not; the money goes to British banks and not the N.I.H.E. In the prevailing economic crisis, housing will inevitably deteriorate even further.

With imperialism reverting to some form of Loyalist supremacy, the function of the N.I.H.E. is changing. This is true of local government as a whole. The clearest illustration of this is the EEC financed scheme for the N.W. (including Donegal) which appears to have collapsed or at least been heavily diluted. The recent Regional Planning Green Paper offers a number of options, implicitly backtracking on recent intentions, coming out in favour of putting responsibility on the shoulders of the district councils and decentralisation i.e. giving a future Loyalist state carte blanche to dispose of funds as it wishes, resting on the support of Loyalist controlled councils.

We come now to the U.W.C. strike. The economic and social developments listed above show the relation between Britain's capitulation to the U.W.C. and the crisis of British capitalism. The latter meant that 'aid' at all levels would be drastically reduced (except for the RUC). Imperialism's strategy could not be carried through in a period of severe recession, necessitating as it did large expenditure in all fields which were being cut back in Britain itself. The re-emergence of Loyalism was sealed



by this crisis, politically necessitating as it did a return to a 6 Co. Loyalist dominated political structure, to carry through a series of cut-backs in Imperialist expenditure. The decision to capitulate following and interlinked with the economic situation to produce a determination to hand over to a Loyalist coalition which is to the forefront in campaigning on all areas which are affected by the crisis in Britain, of which one of the manifestations is the rapid growth of Loyalist community and tenant associations. In turn the growth of populism has been a cause of friction within the paramilitaries.

What is the function of the upsurge in Loyalism for Imperialism? It is unquestionably to take over the areas affected i.e. all social issues; to use their influence and monopoly of power, and repression to ensure that no W.C. upheavals result from the cut-backs, to do this by officially sectarianising all 6 Co. structures. This is precisely what was shown in the milk strike (The R.U.C.) and is being shown in Fermanagh District Council. Finally using these functions it is to maintain the 6 co. state for the next time Britain tries to reform it. The obstacles in the way are numerous; the one that matters here are the internal contradictions of Loyalism. What happens when for e.g. the Prod. working class discovers that the N.I.H.E. is not the cause of their housing conditions? This contradiction is especially intense since for the first time since the Orange monolith started breaking down in the early 60's the protestant working class are under the control of mass based populist organisations. The paramilitaries seem to be resolving this by demanding the political expression of their mass power, a change in the balance of power between the politicians and themselves. This course will, however, intensify the contradictions within the conflict. All sections of Loyalism are being forced to increase their 'social awareness'. Hence the importance of the R.U.C. for the Loyalists and Britain in case the paramilitaries prove incapable of maintaining their stranglehold.

ON: RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

any of the major anti-imperialist organisations and the combined poll of Price and the Republican Clubs amounted to 8,750 votes. The Provisionals also called for a boycott on that occasion which would add to this figure in any estimation of anti-imperialist support. In the Convention the Republican Clubs, the CPI and CPI (M-L) received 1,500 votes. So even if the entire drop in anti-unionist voting could be attributed to the boycott, this would add up to a total of 10,000 votes either cast or withheld indicating support for anti-imperialist organisations. Given that several thousand of this figure must be due to apathy this figures does not represent an advance on the February voting

out more likely hides an actual decline in support for the anti-imperialist groups.

Outside Belfast the boycott campaign appears to have had largely marginal effect. In Derry, the SDLP dropped 3,000 from October but still equalled its 23,000 of February. South Antrim and Mid-Ulster followed a similar pattern, although in the latter it is clear that the 16,000 who voted for Bernadette McAliskey in February when Ivan Cooper polled 19,000 have not transferred their electoral support to the SDLP who, despite polling 26,000 in October have now fallen back to the February figure.

It is indicative of the presence of a significant anti-imperialist consciousness still within the anti-unionist population.

And in South Down the boycott bit comparatively hard, dropping the SDLP vote by 6,500 to nearly 2,000 down on the February total.

For anti-imperialists the decisive test of the success of the boycott lies not in the overall reduction in the anti-unionist vote but in the extent to which it struck at those in the catholic community who have consistently attempted to smash the anti-imperialist struggle and to channel mass action to their own electoral ends — represented primarily by the SDLP.

In this test it can be seen that the boycott was only a limited success and that the decisive inroads on the support of the SDLP, necessary if the anti-imperialist struggle is to be pushed forward, have yet to be made by the revolutionary movement.

The SDLP has retained its dominating influence within the anti-unionist population marked in the February 1974 election, while the revolutionary movement has fallen back over the last year.

But if the SDLP has retained its base of support in the catholic areas, the overall outcome of the election with the further consolidation of anti-power sharing loyalists must force the SDLP in to a crisis of political direction.

The credibility of its strategy towards agreed power sharing and the illusions within the Catholic community that this is possible and on which the SDLP is based have been placed in severe jeopardy.

The Party is, as a result, being pulled in two directions. One is towards a further dilution of the calls for power-sharing and the Irish Dimension in an attempt to come to terms with the UUUC. This pressure can be seen to be represented in the post-election comments of Derry's Bishop Daly when he said "For the first time in the whole history of the North, the catholic community through their electoral representatives firmly committed to working within the constitution of Northern Ireland... This is what the much mis-represented 'Irish Dimension' is about". Thus the wing of the SDLP most closely representing Catholic middle class elements aims to further intensify appeasement to loyalism in the hope that minimum gains may be retained, by turning such concepts as the Irish Dimension upside down.

At the same time other elements within the SDLP are turning towards populist rhetoric, hence Paddy Devlin's forecast of the RUC and UDR backed re-introduction of a "tyrannical" Orange Supremacist State, and a stress on the strengthening of the Irish Dimension, plus appeals for a turn round of Southern Government policy.

The SDLP may be able to steer a perilous path between the two directions or the divisions may become irreconcilable within one party. Certainly divisions within the British Westminster parties following the loyalist victory, as temporarily opened up within the Tories with the suggestion of linking up the UUUC with the Conservative Party, would exacerbate such a crisis.

Even without fragmentation of the SDLP itself, elements of the catholic middle class may

start to polarise around alternatives, such as Tom Conaty or even the anti-repression priests, Father Faul and Murray.

But neither wing of the SDLP is prepared to face the possibly political fatal dangers of breaking from parliamentarianism at the present stage and neither the SDLP nor any other middle class leadership is capable of formulating the only response capable of adequately combatting a hand over to the loyalists — mass working class action.

Effects on anti-imperialist population

The results of the election emphasised the necessity of the revolutionary movement to break out of the comparative isolation it has been in over the past two years within the catholic community in order to challenge the hegemony of the SDLP.

The boycott showed the Provisionals have retained significant support and that layers in the anti-unionist working class remain opposed to British imposed "solutions". But the boycott support coupled with the set-back in electoral support for the Republican Clubs shows that the isolation has not been overcome.

In such a situation of isolation, boycott campaigns have in-built dangers. Boycotts are rarely successful in terms of breaking elements of the working class from reformist leaderships when a concrete alternative to the election cannot be offered. The election results show that this was the situation with the Convention election. But if the boycott had this crucial weakness, its political content did focus pre-election discussion on the loyalist take-over threat.

This did exacerbate the internal crisis of the SDLP by exposing its inability to present policies to meet the situation.

But if the boycott campaign, the most extensively carried out by the organisation, was partially successful in raising this issue, it was unable to favourably resolve the question mark which hangs over the ability of the revolutionary movement to meet the challenge of the take-over.

Officials weakness?

Also, the set-back of the Republican Clubs election campaign must be seen not simply as an indication of the Officials' isolation within the revolutionary vanguard but of a general disenchantment with the anti-imperialist movement within the working class.

The overall Republican Club vote dropped from 3.3 per cent of the total poll to 2.2 per cent. Their vote fell by around a half in West Belfast, Derry and Mid-Ulster and by a slightly smaller margin in Armagh and South Down, since October. The gradually growing electoral support over the past two years fell away.

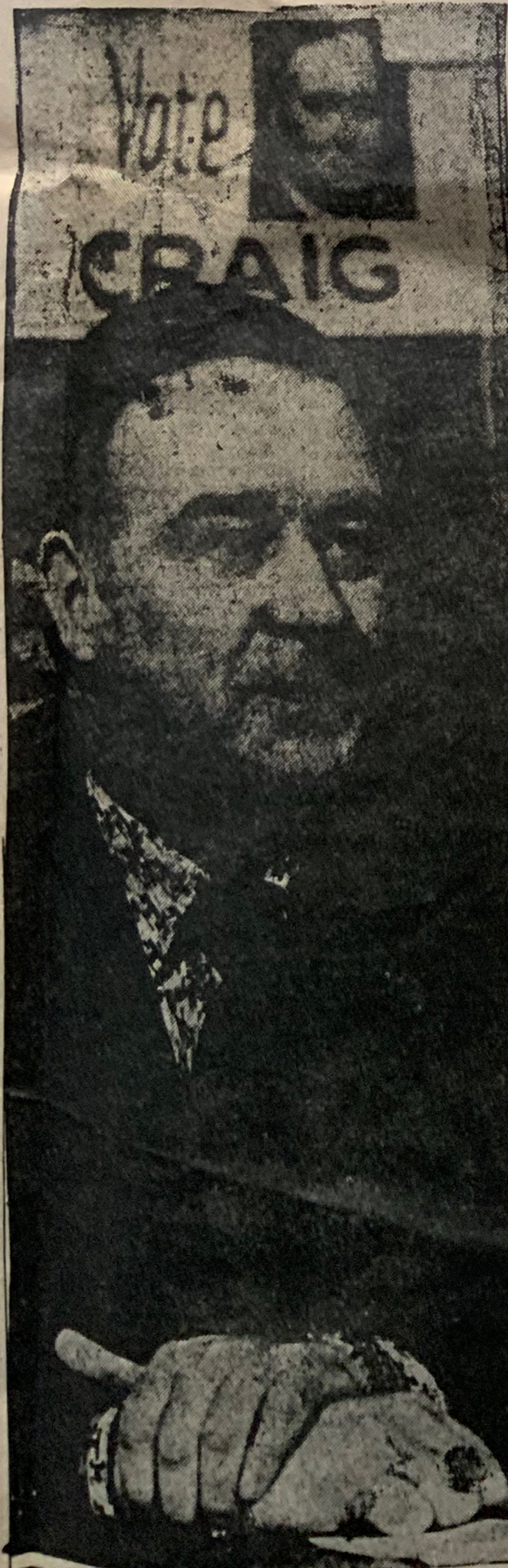
Significantly, the Republican Clubs were outside the debate on loyalist take over. The Officials failure to answer the needs of the anti-unionist working class reflected in the low poll. At a time of sectarian assassinations and attacks on the catholic population and a loyalist take-over looming, abstract calls for united action with the protestant working class on social issues failed to find response within the anti-unionist population.

Results and prospects

Two primary factors emerge from the elections:

- 1) The UUUC has consolidated its position within the protestant population. The demand for a loyalist dominated power structure in the North has retained mass support, and confirms the trend towards the institution of such a structure.

contd. P 6



I.R.S.P. perspectives and tasks

The holding of the I.R.S.P.'s first annual conference provides us with a basis from which we can attempt a critical assessment of the development and potential of the I.R.S.P. However drawing up a balance sheet of the conference is not simply a matter of counting up the pro's and cons and abstracting one from the other. Instead we will attempt to isolate the fundamental issues at stake and examine the conference in this light.

We welcomed the formation of the I.R.S.P. and we did so on two main grounds; In the short term in so far as they recognised the necessity for linking up the national struggle and the economic struggles of the working class we could foresee them playing a decisive role in organising the minority in the north to resist a Loyalist takeover and in mobilising the southern working class against the collaborationist policies of the Free State government i.e. as an important element in the current struggle.

In the longer term in that they are a grouping of militants who have broken from the reformism of the Officials and who are orientated towards revolutionary socialist politics i.e. as an important development in the building of a revolutionary party.

The politics of organisation

One of the primary tasks of any new organisation is to critically examine its origins, to learn from its past mistakes and to break from its old method of thinking. The so called feud between the I.R.S.P. and the Officials in Belfast masks what in the long run is a much more important struggle for the I.R.S.P. — the struggle against the politics of its origins. The struggle for socialist republicanism must of necessity be a struggle against republicanism because building a mass revolutionary party in Ireland involves this paradox.

- (1) Breaking with the political ideology, practice and organisational methods of republicanism.
- (2) Maintaining a close identification with the revolutionary traditions of Irish Republicanism.

It was significant that a large part of the I.R.S.P. conference was devoted to discussing the question of organisation. Many delegates showed an awareness of the weakness of the traditional republican organisational principles. This weakness was located primarily at the level of a lack of democracy within the traditional republican organisations. However this rather one-sided approach produced a false debate around the question of centralism versus democracy; false because one is impossible without the other. The organisational structures which exist within the Official and the Provisionals are certainly not democratic, but neither are they centralist. Both structures have as their basis a membership which is in a very fundamental sense — a-political. The rank and file take no part in shaping the organisation's perspectives or in deciding policies. They act simply as "rubber stamps" at Ard Fheiseanna and conferences rarely if ever challenging the leadership's decisions.

However this lack of politically conscious membership not only effects the level of democracy within both organisations but it seriously hinders the implementation of any policy decision made. In effect different cumainn and branches interpret policy decisions in their own way or simply ignore them altogether. Even when cumainn attempt to implement decisions the individual members will invariably fail to carry them out, particularly if they don't understand the purpose of particular decisions anyway. As a result, not only Provisional Sinn Fein but also Official Sinn Fein tend to be extremely inefficient in their activity and to a large extent, to waste the considerable resources they do have.

The willingness of delegates to participate in political discussion at the conference represents a qualitative step forward from Sinn Fein Ard Fheiseanna where important issues tend to be glossed over and only a tiny minority of delegates take part in the proceedings while the debate itself showed a higher political level than is to be found at meetings of either wing of Sinn Fein.

Towards a programme

As well as tackling the organisational question, the I.R.S.P. Conference also dealt with the related problem of the development of a political programme. The debate surrounding the various proposals for such a programme show how far the I.R.S.P. has advanced beyond the Official Republican Movement conceptions but it also

showed the extent to which it is still influenced by them. This was to be seen, not so much in the context of the proposals as in the way they were approached by the conference. Delegates seemed to view the idea of a political program in terms of a set of principles which members would adhere to rather than as an action program which would guide the organisation's interventions in popular struggles and enable them to give leadership to these struggles. As such the debate on the political program was to a large extent divorced from the tasks facing the I.R.S.P. in the current situation. The most obvious question which was reduced almost entirely to a discussion on the pros and cons of the demand for abortion. How the I.R.S.P. should fight for the demands of women, of how they should intervene in the womens movement was never discussed.

This dichotomy between "policy" and "strategy" is of course not peculiar to the I.R.S.P. but is inherent in the whole republican movement. The organisations' policies are decided on at Ard Fheiseanna where the whole membership is represented while its strategy is decided by the leadership without the rank and file membership being consulted. The abstract/pragmatic cleavage which was continually evident at the conference was a direct result of this dichotomy because to many delegates the "theoretically correct" proposals appeared irrelevant to the real political struggles they were faced with.

Where is the I.R.S.P. going?

The I.R.S.P. conference provided us with little direct indication as to what role they will play in the coming period. Throughout the conference many delegates made references to the current political situation but at no time was there any real analysis of it. Most importantly of all the danger of a Loyalist takeover which the R.M.G. and P.D. have been warning about for almost a year, was never dealt with. This failure to even discuss the nature of Loyalism was the single major weakness of the I.R.S.P. conference. One motion which called for the organisation of mass self-defence for anti-imperialist working class areas was passed but the words "anti-imperialist" were deleted. The I.R.S.P. surely don't believe that republican socialists should defend Loyalist areas or that these areas are in danger of attack? But if they don't believe this they should make quite clear what they do mean! For too long republican socialists have been slow to call for the defense of the Catholic working class and for resistance to Loyalism lest they be denounced as "sectarian". But by failing to spell out the real character of "sectarianism" i.e. the attempts by one sector of the population, aided by imperialism, to maintain their ascendancy over another sector, they only help to continue the confusion within the working class and fall into the trap laid by middle class liberals like Conor Cruise O'Brien.

Economism and Republicanism

Some of the "economist" attitudes which the Officials have fallen prey to were evident at the I.R.S.P. Conference. There was a tendency among some delegates to under-estimate or ignore the crucial role of the southern working class in relation to the national question. While socialists should of course fight for the economic demands of the working class they shouldn't forget that there has never yet been a revolution over the demand for higher wages. On the contrary it is precisely in relation to the national question that the southern working class will be radicalised and we can say with confidence that we will never achieve national liberation or socialism until the southern working class actively participates in the national struggle. These same economist conceptions were apparent in the attitudes that some delegates took towards the traditions of republicanism. The opposition of some I.R.S.P. members towards holding Easter Parades is a clear case of this. While revolutionary socialists must recognise that the politics of traditional republicanism is not capable of carrying through the Irish revolution, we do not reject the traditions themselves. It is not because we agree with the politics of Wolfe Tone or Pearse that we commemorate them, but because they epitomise the centuries old struggle against imperialism. Revolutionary socialists in Ireland face many disadvantages, but one decided advantage that we do have is the revolutionary traditions of the Irish working class. The Easter parades are only symbols of the past, but they are symbols of a revolutionary past, a past which

the mass of the Irish working class identifies with. If we are to win the future we must claim these traditions for ourselves.

The Convention Elections

The decision of the I.R.S.P. Conference to abstain from taking part in the Convention Elections was an unfortunate one. The main reason given for this abstentionist position was that the Convention was simply a ploy by British imperialism to maintain its control over Ireland and to contest would simply be "to give substance to an illusion as an alternative to confronting reality". But the process of handing over power to the Loyalists is no illusion! It is very real indeed and unless it is resisted it will have disastrous consequences for the Irish revolution. One of the best ways of preparing the Catholic working class to face this threat is to take part in the elections and to use them as an opportunity for

putting forward a revolutionary alternative to the collaborationist policies of the S.D.L.P. and the reformist republicanism of the Officials. Many delegates were in favour of this but felt that the organisation was in too weak a position and that their members would face attack from the Officials if they were to participate in the elections. This may be true but as against this participating in the elections would win the I.R.S.P. new members and strengthen them in areas where they are weak. It would also expose the slander campaign being waged against the I.R.S.P. by the Officials and their liberal allies in the media. It would show to all that the I.R.S.P. is not a grouping of "gangsters, malcontents etc." but a revolutionary organisation with serious politics. It is clear from the scant coverage given to the conference in the media that the I.R.S.P. will have a hard fight to win this recognition.

JAN MC LEAN

FIANNA FAIL'S NEW 'REPUBLICAISM'

Recent months have seen changes in the orientation of the Fianna Fail party, as evidence by its both vociferous and ambiguous attitude towards the Criminal Justice Jurisdiction Bill. The much publicised return of Charlie Haughey to the Fianna Fail front bench was greeted with a certain uneasiness by the Press. His reinstatement as the Shadow Minister for Health follows in the wake of a concerted campaign by him and his supporters throughout the Cumainn for the past year or so. Haughey now enjoys wide support amongst the party's rank and file, so much so that following his reinstatement he immediately posed for photographers with his arm around Neil Blaney, his co-defendant in the 1970 Arms Trial. Haughey's return, combined with Fianna Fail's offensive against the Criminal Justice Jurisdiction Bill is a highly significant development which has not gone unnoticed in Coalition circles.

Development of Fianna Fail

What has become known as the "Republican turn" of Fianna Fail can only be explained in the context of the party's development before and after the "Arms Trial" of 1970. Fianna Fail was born out of the defeat of the national revolution of the 1916-21 period. Its program of economic protectionism combined with an institutionalised republican demagoguery was a clear reflection of the inability of the native Irish ruling class to complete the national revolution through the reunification of the country. It was unable to complete that task because of its dependency on British Imperialism — as any attempt to smash partition inevitably meant a full scale confrontation with both British Imperialism and its northern allies. Thus while Fianna Fail maintained its republican demagoguery it was always tied to British Imperialism. While its protectionist policies did achieve some marginal success they inevitably led to a decline in the 1950s, which led to the Program of Economic Expansion in

1958 and the Free Trade Agreement of 1965. These measures opened up the Irish economy to capital inflow from abroad, dropped the protective barriers and changed the emphasis of the agricultural policy from one of tillage to grassland. In the light of such radical changes in the orientation of the Irish economy the pseudo-nationalist standpoint of Fianna Fail was becoming obsolete. British Imperialism favoured a realignment between North and South, some form of federal relationship was needed because this period saw an increase in foreign investment in Northern Ireland also. This new industry was not based on the traditional sectarian employment policies of the Unionist ruling class, it was more profitable and it sought the integration of the Catholic working class into a more liberalised Northern State. However such plans did not take account of the depth of the caste mentality of the Loyalist working class and as the history of the past decade shows any attempt to liberalise, however slightly, the six county statelet has been met with increasingly well organised opposition.

What Haughey represents

However, throughout the 60s Fianna Fail led this attempt to liquidate the Republican ideology, which so ill-befitted the changed circumstances. At all levels of Irish life a "kultur Kampf" was led against "backward republicanism", people were exhorted to embrace a new cosmopolitanism as apart from the old parochial minded nationalism. Insofar as this was based a big economic revival in the 60s and the appearance of a liberalisation in the 6 Counties, it worked. So too, Fianna Fail managed the about-turn in ideology until the explosion of 1969 when it became clear that not only were Catholics being told that reforms were out of the question but the firm implication was that if they pressed further they would be smashed into the ground on a grand scale exceeding the pogroms of the 1920s. This situation quickly brought about a crisis in Fianna Fail with Neil Blaney, Michael O Morain, Kevin Boland, Paudge Brennan, Sean Sherwin and Des Foley all departed from Fianna Fail in one way or another. Haughey was deposed but still remained within the party after he failed to overthrow Lynch. Even though the Haughey-Blaney wing had been deposed they still maintained a strong influence

contd. p6

campaign to defend women political prisoners

Two months ago "Women Against Imperialism" an ad hoc body of socialist and feminist groups of women, was initiated by the R.M.G. womens caucus. One of its first activities was to place a picket on the "Women for Peace" session of the R.D.S. Seminar on 1st/2nd March.

Several weeks later a meeting organised by the womens caucus of R.M.G. under the aegis of "Women Against Imperialism" was held to discuss the role of Women in the National Struggle. Women members of P.D./R.M.G. spoke and the I.R.S.P. sent fraternal greetings to that meeting. At the time Rita O'Hare was on trial and a growing awareness to defend Rita came out of the meeting.

Because of the wishes of Rita herself, activity was held over until after the trial.

On her conviction, another meeting, again organised by the womens caucus of the R.M.G. was held in the Ormorgon Hotel, wholeheartedly supported by "Women against Imperialism" — with

the exception of Women against Oppression Trinity College Dublin who, though they attended in the audience have some unclear disagreement with the nature of the meeting and of the committee which arose out of that meeting. Though they were official asked to send a speaker Sinn Fein Kevin St. did not reply and did not send a speaker — much to the regret of the R.M.G. Much of the audience was comprised of individual members of Kevin St.

A committee to defend Women Political Prisoners

This committee has involved members of the Prisoners Action Group, S.W.M. and interested individuals as well as the organisations mentioned above, and in Dun Laoire another committee has sprung up, initiated by individual Provos, R.M.G., P.D. I.R.S.P. The committee has been building towards a national demonstration in Limerick. Leaflets and posters were widely distributed.

THE CHURCH AND ABORTION

The Irish Hierarchy has just issued a statement on abortion, and its reactionary, anti-woman content should come as no surprise to the church's policy since Humane Vitae has been steadfastly deny us the right to control our fertility, while putting its weight behind building "right to life" campaigns (like the society for the protection of the unborn child, in England) wherever the woman's movement is attempting to change or liberalise laws on contraception or abortion. The life of the unborn child, they proclaim is sacred from the time of conception; "this is not a question of sectarian morality but instead concerns the law of God" ... (Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia in '73).

Church's justification

The Church bases this claim on the following piece of theological reasoning: 'God only gives life, which begins at conception, and so no-one except God has the right to take innocent human life'.

Contradictions

This seems fine, from their point of view, but a look at the church's historical record, soon shows that their 'divine' concept of the 'sanctity of human life' is consistent, and only, in fact, enforced over the abortion issue. Their whole theological history on abortion has, for a 'god given law', dithered in considerable confusion. Abortion was, in fact, outlawed as murder by the Eastern church in 800AD (the custom was to allow it in roman law), but it was only finally formulated for the west as such from conception, by Pope Paul VI in 1972. In the 1,100 years that come in between church teaching meandered through a maze of theological arguments, mostly centring on when the could be said to enter the body of the fetus. The 2 church fathers Jerome and Augustine settled for Aristotle's (an ancient Greek, pre Christian philosopher) definition; that the soul enters a male fetus after 40 days, a female after 80 and so allowed abortion up to this time. Quinas agreed with this scheme and it continued as the basis for church practice, emphasised by papal rulings in 1140 and 1224. Abortion was viewed as a serious sin, but not murder up to ensoulment. This position moved even further, that abortion was RIGHT before ensoulment if a woman's life was in danger but in 1588 a sharp change came when Sixtus V equated all abortion with murder and said all penalties

(church and secular) should be the same for both. Three years later he was over-ruled by Gregory XVI when all penalties for abortion (except after ensoulment) were abolished.

By the beginning of the 18th century modern science had made inroads into the church's unscientific concept of ensoulment, but it wasn't abandoned until the beginning of the 19th century, when Pius IX made all penalties for abortion uniform. The tide had begun to turn against us, in 1917 anyone having or helping with an abortion was excommunicated; in 1930 Pius XI gave the fetus equal right to live with the woman (and incidentally outlawed all forms of contraception as unnatural); and in 1972, as we have seen Paul VI gave the fetus full rights from conception, ending his statement "The Church stand against it (abortion) has not changed and will never change".

Through several wars the church has freely given its blessing and active support to the bombing and slaughter of civilians (Cardinal Conway blessing troops for Vietnam), has often supported the executions of 'the innocent' to stop the spread of communism. The church produced 'Kill a gook for Christ' badges, during the Vietnam war and has itself burnt and

tortured men and women who didn't agree with it's views. The thousands of women over Europe who were burnt as witches are a poignant example of how it will bend to doctrine on the 'right to life'.



"Double-Effect"

This 'bending' of their principles is usually justified by a piece of theology, formulated by aquinas (to excuse killing in self-defence), the "Double-Effect" theory. What this means, in effect is that if an action, with ambiguous results can be proved to have more of a good effect than a bad, it is justified; for example, they justify the murder of civilians in war as the good result (preservation of the State) outweighing the bad result (innocent people dying). It was a formula, used also during inquisition.

But, when case is abortion the church tightens its formulations and a woman's life, threatened by illness etc. during a pregnancy is only safeguarded, by the double-effect theory, in 3 very specific cases; uterine cancer, appendicitis and (since 1947) tubal pregnancy. This, in spite of the fact that whatever the effect on the woman's life, in many cases the fetus will not survive anyway, and a woman's life is then equated with an unviable mass of cells. The church also prefers in the cases they do allow, total removal of a woman's reproductive organs to "tampering" with the foetus

Why the Church is so hard on abortion

The Church's 'divine principle' is obviously less concerned with the right to life and more with the need to keep women down. They have in fact, taken as their own prerogative a woman's

contrl. p7

WOMENS CHARTER CATCHES ON

Some weeks ago, the women's caucus of the R.M.G. issued a call to several groups of socialist and radical feminist groups of women to come together to campaign around an agreed charter against women's oppression. The response was good, the first meeting attended by representatives from: Radical Feminists, International Lesbian Caucus, U.C.D. Womens Group, Women Against Oppression T.C.D.; Women's Caucus R.M.G.; Women's Caucus S.W.M.; representatives from Womens National Council Labour Party (observing); representative from Dublin Shop Stewards Committee; the women's caucus of Peoples Democracy individual women members of IRSP have also indicated their willingness to become involved. Members of the C.P. and Official

Sinn Fein were invited but refrained from attending. Individuals of the I.T.G.W.U. an ad-hoc body, have pledged their support for any campaign that gets off the ground.

At the last meeting a charter for women was discussed and agreed upon which will be put to a conference planned for June 8th (venue to be announced). All groups and individuals who are interested in building a campaign around this charter will be invited to attend, and on registration will be entitled to participate fully and vote during the conference.

Below we publish the charter to be presented to the Conference by a steering committee of groups involved in its formulation.

WOMENS CAUCUS R.M.G.

IV

Equality in education – state financed, secular, co-educational schools with full community control at all levels. Specifically:

- 1) an end to enforced conditioning of sex roles through curriculum, teaching methods and materials (i.e. text books, games, etc.),
- 2) the provision of local pre-school centres for all desiring to use them,
- 3) an end to segmentation of education, to be replaced by fully comprehensive second and third level schools, incorporating both technical and academic learning,
- 4) ending to discriminatory barring from particular courses traditionally relegated to men; encouragement for women to enter these courses through programs of reserved places, etc.
- 5) funding and encouragement of a Women's Studies Program at second and third level,
- 6) provision of free creches on campuses,
- 7) provision of a women's centre on campuses,
- 8) equal access to further education for all women, regardless of age or marital status.

V

The male rate for the job where men and women are working together. Where the labour force is wholly female, the jobs done by these women should be upgraded and a national minimum wage implemented, linked to the cost of living increase. We reject the use of job evaluation techniques for the purposes of negotiating equal pay claims.

The right of women to have access to all types of employment, including all types of skilled employment, and promotion

regardless of marital status, pregnancy, or maternity.

The right to training and re-training for all occupations including apprenticeships, and the present system of worker-determined flexible hours. That it be compulsory for all employers to make readily available day release courses, with pay, for all employees.

Working conditions to be, without deterioration of present conditions, the same for women as for men; in addition, the institution of worker-determined flexible hours. The removal of protective legislation should not be a condition of gaining equal pay, and should be instead, extended to include men.

The right to statutory maternity leave of twenty weeks with full net pay; additional leave with pay in cases of illness connected therewith, the right to attend pre-natal and post-natal clinics as required, prohibition of dismissal of women from employment on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity. Employers to ensure that every effort is made to facilitate employees who are pregnant insofar as the latter's duties are concerned, the guarantee of reintegration into employment without loss of status or service, the right to further training or re-training after statutory or prolonged maternity leave, and the option for equivalent forms of maternity leave.

VI

State provision of funds and premises for the establishment of women's centre;

kick and beat them

– the old fashion way!

The three main themes offered by the United May Day Committee (UMDC) were "working class unity and solidarity: for the fight against unemployment; for ending discrimination against women; for equality in education and employment for all young people" (from the official UMDC leaflet). The first and third themes were quite adequately dealt with in the speeches. Another sub-theme was that of solidarity with the people of Chile. This, too, received considerable mention. The question of the women's struggle, however, became a point of violent confrontation.

Approximately six weeks before May Day, invitation letters (beginning 'Dear Sir and Brother' and ending 'Fraternal greetings') were sent to various groups, asking them to join the march. This invitation did not include speaking rights. The Women's Liberation Movement of University College Dublin, struck by the sectarianism of the committee, and by the fact that, despite all the fine mouthings concerning the struggle of women (in this, international women's year), there was not a single speaker actually representing the women's movement. This group applied to the UMDC for speaking rights before May Day, and was turned down. The excuses offered were: 1) lack of time, 2) WLM/UCD was only one group among many that wished to speak (although the only women's group), and 3) the "woman question" would be fairly dealt with by the other speakers. During one of the first conversations between the UMDC convener (a member of CPI) and WLM/UCD, he said that although he supported the idea, some of the groups on the committee felt there was no justification for an autonomous women's movement.

Concurrent with all these 'negotiations', a meeting was called to form a coalition of women's groups, Irishwomen United, to sponsor a convention: to draw up a charter of women's rights, and to act as a solidarity group when certain issues arose. This was one of those issues. A decision was taken to march and to distribute a leaflet to the meeting to explain our attitudes.

Immediately prior to the rally, we were informed that the committee had just met again and re-affirmed their decision. Since the inquest was no longer from an isolated women's group, their new justification was the two remaining excuses. We listened to the speeches of the six UMDC representatives, hearing no mention of the women's struggle, save a brief statement by the female representative of Sinn Fein, which was only to say that an autonomous movement was wrong. One of our sisters went up to the speaking platform after these speakers had finished to express our disgust at the lack of recognition and general sexist tendencies on the part of our 'fellow comrades'. She, and the women following behind her, were kicked and beaten off the platform by members and supporters of the 'United' committee. The crowd supported us, both physically and verbally, shouting "Let her speak!"

The committee declared the meeting finished, removed the platform, and, in an act of complete hypocrisy, sang the Internationale – to drown out the women who decided to address the crowd without the platform. As a result of the violence, the sister who was first on the platform to speak was admitted to hospital for two days, undergoing tests to determine the extent of her injuries at the hands of her 'brothers'.

The outcome of May Day was not so much a learning of new lessons, as a reinforcement of old suspicions. International Women's Year, although it has shown the faint stirrings of sincere interest and understanding of the movement, has also made us the 'pet cause' to be trotted out on all suitable left-wing occasions. We will support the struggles of all oppressed groups but will also continue building our own strength, for we are justifiably wary of our 'fellow revolutionaries' promises that their party will take care of us as soon as the revolution is squared away. We are fighting oppression on the basis that all people are equal, but, on May Day, we were shown again that even in the socialist movement, women are repressed by some of their 'fellow comrades'.

Toraigh na dTonn,

member of Irishwomen United, although not writing on behalf of the whole group

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