



Trotskyists debate Ireland

1939, mid-50s, 1969



Introduction: freeing Marxism from pseudo-Marxist legacy

By Sean Matgamna

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"Since my early days I have got, through Marx and Engels, the greatest sympathy and esteem for the heroic struggle of the Irish for their independence" — *Leon Trotsky, letter to Nora Connolly, 6 June 1936*

In 1940, after the American Trotskyists split, the Shachtman group issued a ringing declaration in support of the idea of a "Third Camp" — the camp of the politically independent revolutionary working class and of genuine national liberation movements against imperialism.

"What does the Third Camp mean?", it asked, and it replied:

"It means Czech students fighting the Gestapo in the streets of Prague and dying before Nazi rifles in the classrooms, with revolutionary slogans on their lips.

"It means African natives going on strike in the Rhodesian copper mines and fighting bloody battles with the police.

"It means the Irish Revolutionary Army keeping green the traditions of the Easter Rebellion with a brilliant and implacable guerilla campaign against British authority in the heart of England.

"It means Indian steel and textile and jute workers forcing concessions from the British Raj in militant strikes.

"It means the Red Army soldiers who shot their officers and fraternized with their brothers in the Finnish army.

"It means the anti-conscription rioters in Australia, the millions of AFL and CIO rank-and-filers whose pressure is causing American labor chiefs to talk isolationism, the Polish peasants who seized the land when the landowners fled and the Polish workers who set up short-lived Communes in Vilna and Lvov before the coming of the Red Army.

"No, the Third Camp is not a myth. It exists, and its members are legion: the submerged, smoldering working masses of the world, those who do the working and starving in peacetime and the dying in wartime. It is our aim and our revolutionary duty to organize these, to make our press the voice of the Third Camp".

In fact, the IRA at that time was formally allied to Germany — to Hitler's Germany. It pursued its own independent objectives, but it did it by actively aligning itself with England's enemies.

The "Chief of Staff" of the right-wing segment of the divided IRA, Sean Russell, died in 1940 on a Germany submarine that was taking him back to Ireland.

Unlike Lenin, Martov, and the other socialists who made use of Germany's wish to defeat Russia in World War 1, and made a limited agreement that let them travel through Germany in a sealed train to the Finland station in St Petersburg, the IRA made a general alliance with Germany.

In principle, an oppressed nation has a right to ally with its enemy's enemy, to try to use such an alliance for its own purposes. The Irish insurgents of 1916 had made an alliance with Germany. The Declaration of Independence which Patrick Pearse read out to a very small audience of accidental onlookers outside the General Post Office on the first day of the Rising, Easter Monday, spoke of the insurgents' "galant allies in Europe".

In principle the 1940s IRA, too, had a right to ally with and use German imperialism for its own ends. But the idea that Ireland would be better off in a Europe dominated by Hitler-imperialist Germany, or that Irish anti-imperialists should want Hitler's victory because it meant British defeat, was, in political terms, and in terms of Ireland's interests and need, stupid beyond words.

German victory would involve the enslavement to varying degrees of the peoples of Europe, including the English and the Northern Ireland Unionists; the literal enslavement of the

Slavic peoples; the annihilation of Jews, gypsies, and god knows who else.

If nonetheless Irish nationalists, Irish "anti-imperialists", could ignore the especially depraved and demented character of England's imperialist enemy, and wanted it to prevail on the calculation that Catholic Nationalist Ireland might gain, that was nationalism (the nationalism of a very small part of the people of Europe), erected into absolute chauvinism taken to the level of political dementia.

And, of course, the IRA leaders who entered into agreement with Hitler represented only a very small segment of Irish opinion, even of generally anti-British Irish opinion.

The presumption of the IRA, which literally saw itself as the legitimate government of Ireland, to pursue its own foreign policy, was one reason for the ruthlessness with which the Republican De Valera government suppressed it.

But it wasn't just the right-wing IRA. On the same submarine on which Russell died was Frank Ryan, his long-time opponent in the Republican movement and leader of the "left" (i.e. Stalinist) Republicans throughout the 1930s. One of the participants in the mid-50s socialist discussion on Ireland reviewed in this pamphlet, Dominic Behan, invokes the name of Ryan as a left Republican saint.

After Russell's death, Ryan chose to return to Germany, where he was an honoured guest of the government until his death from natural causes in 1944.

The full story is stranger still. In 1936 Ryan had taken 200 Republicans to fight in Spain against the Franco fascists. He was captured and came close to facing a fascist firing squad. He was then rescued by agents of the German state and wound up in Germany, where he worked voluntarily on assaying Irish and British politics for the Abwehr.

Ryan — the anti-fascist who had almost died in the cause of anti-fascism — was most likely plunged into terminal political confusion by the Hitler-Stalin pact.

His Stalinist strand of "left" Irish Republicanism was no part of the Third Camp either. In 1940, during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, Stalinists were decidedly in one of the imperialist camps. They would change to the other imperialist camp when the Nazis invaded Russia in June 1941 — but not to any sort of "Third Camp" position.

IRELAND AS EMBLEM

So why did the new-founded Workers' Party include the Irish anti-imperialists in their picture of the Third Camp taking shape? Not that they were desperately short of examples of Third Camp forces, though surely they were, but of what Ireland and Irish Republicanism meant in the international communist movement of the 20th century.

Ireland, Irish revolution, Irish nationalism, and Irish Republicanism were emblematic of anti-imperialism, rather than something real to be analysed concretely.

Famously James Connolly wrote that "Ireland without her people means nothing to me". For the left, by 1940 "Ireland" without her real people, an Ireland that was no longer the real Ireland, had come to be a token, a symbol or political token to be "coined" mechanically. The contrast between the "rebel Ireland" which those who composed that Third Camp declaration had in mind and the reality — Irish Republican allies, clients, and stooges of Nazi German and of Russian imperialism — neatly sums all that up.

Ireland had a special place in the outlook of revolutionary socialists. Karl Marx had used Ireland's history and the history of its relationship with Britain extensively in Capital volume 1. Marx, Engels, and Marx's daughters had been active and passionate supporters of the Fenian movement, and the literary expression of that support was in print. Everywhere

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Mural of James Connolly

Marx and Engels were known, Ireland was known.

Everywhere the history of Britain, the pioneering country of modern industrial and commercial civilisation, was known, the history of Ireland was also known. Everywhere Britain was resented or opposed, the history of Irish rebellions was known and often looked to as example and model.

Everywhere the armies of Catholic missionaries sent out from Ireland from the mid 19th century onwards reached, they brought their nationalist account of Ireland's oppression, and Catholic Ireland's indomitable refusal to bow down to their overlords. In 1980, when Robert Mugabe was in London to negotiate the settlement that created Zimbabwe, he made a quick trip to see the Ireland whose history he had learned about from Irish Catholic missionaries in his youth.

The picture of Ireland taken from Marx and Engels was fixed. The real Ireland evolved and changed. The "Irish question" was repeatedly revised and redefined in the course of history.

THE "IRISH QUESTION"

In the 1860s the Irish question was mainly three questions: land, Home Rule, and Disestablishment of the Anglican church, which was alien to both Ireland's Catholics and its Presbyterians, the two majority religions on the island.

Karl Marx thought that the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 would eliminate the religious sectarian conflict. The Tory party thought that the series of Land Acts that turned peasant rent into lower annual mortgage payments would "kill Home Rule with kindness" (and many European Marxists came to think that too: Lenin polemicised against some of them, Karl Radek for instance).

The Liberal party championed Home Rule for Ireland from 1886. It seemed only a matter of time before Ireland achieved a measure of self-government, though not much greater than that of, say, London.

As that prospect loomed in 1912 and after, the Protestant-Unionists rebelled, armed themselves, and declared that their stronghold in north-east Ulster would resist the home rule government which Britain was about to set up in Dublin. For the first time in the 20th century, they brought the gun back into Irish politics.

The Tory-Unionist party pledged to support them, and helped them to arm and train an army to resist Home-Rule – the Ulster Volunteer Force. Britain seemed close to civil war.

Some of the Catholic nationalist Irish followed the lead of the Unionists and armed themselves, creating the Irish Volunteers. The outbreak of the First World War cut across these developments. Some of the nationalists organised an armed rebellion in 1916. The survivors of the 1916 Rising then organised the secession from Westminster of a majority of the Irish MPs elected in the 1918 United Kingdom general election. When Britain refused to recognise the democratically

elected parliament created by that secession, they fought a war with Britain in 1919-21. They won Dominion status (real self-government such as Canada and Australia had) in 1922 for 26 counties, all of Ireland bar six north-eastern counties given self-government but within Britain.

This is how *The Communist*, paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain, summed up that history in July 1922:

"For hundreds of years the Irish nation has been fighting an unceasing struggle, at fantastic odds, against the British Empire. For hundreds of years the Irish people have been resisting a hard and diabolically cunning tyranny.

"Economically, this tyranny has kept Ireland poor, starving, and undeveloped. It was accompanied generation after generation by the worst forms of oppression. It produced untold miseries, famines, songs and music of revolt, a literature of protest, and so frequent was revolt and repression that the miseries are remembered fully now, the old songs are sung throughout the land, the old literature is being rewritten in more expressive terms.

"A few times, as when Davitt won for the peasantry land rights from the feudal lords, and Larkin organised strikes and threw the class war into relief, the people have been rallied on purely economic issues. But even in those struggles the national appeal had to be employed".

THE "IRISH QUESTION" REDEFINED

Dominion status made it possible, stage by stage from then on, for the 26 Counties to attain real independence.

Eamonn De Valera's government removed the King of England as head of the Irish state during the abdication crisis in 1936. It negotiated a broad settlement, which included the removal of the last British naval bases, in 1938. It maintained neutrality during the Second World War.

The "Irish question" was redefined by those events.

Now the "Irish question" was "the Partition Question". Six counties in north-east Ulster had been formed into a sub-state within the United Kingdom but possessing Home Rule in a Belfast Parliament.

Within that, the old "Irish Question" transmuted into the Catholic question – the fact that there was a one third, and growing, Catholic minority in the Six Counties, a majority in a large part of the territory. Catholics in Northern Ireland were a bigger minority than all the Protestants would have been in a United Ireland. London left the Belfast government to its own devices, and the Catholics found themselves under a repressive Protestant-sectarian Northern Ireland government.

Most Republicans until the late 1930s had tended to accept the verdict of both segments in the 1922 Sinn Fein: nothing much could be done about partition as long as the majority in Northern Ireland wanted it to continue. But they were far from reconciled to that fact.

Nationalist Ireland attributed to England all or most of the blame for Partition. For some — the Fianna Fail current and the various editions of the Irish Republican Army after the late 30s — the solution was to persuade or (the physical-force Republicans) coerce Britain into ending partition despite Northern Ireland Protestant opposition.

IDEOLOGICAL LIE

The fundamental difficulty with this entire position was that it was based on an ideological lie. The diehard opponents of Irish unity in the 20th century were not the British but the one million Protestant-Unionists concentrated in north-east Ulster.

Certainly, in the past England had fostered and manipulated division in Ireland, but the cleavages had to exist before they could be manipulated.

It was not even fundamentally true that Britain had deliberately "planted" the Protestant population in north-east Ulster. In the 15 and 16th centuries, England had "planted" Protestant settlers in parts of all the four provinces of Ireland, Munster, Leinster, Connacht and Ulster. The only area where a Protestant majority had come to cohere was in north-east Ulster – in territory that had not been "planted" by the British government. The population was the result of spontaneous migration, mainly from lowland Scotland.

An essential element in 20th-century Irish history was the fact that Britain could not control the north-east Ulster opponents of a united Ireland. As late as May 1974 a powerful Protestant-Unionist general strike destroyed Britain's chosen policy for Ireland, Catholic-Protestant power-sharing.

The self-bewildering ideological lie that Britain was responsible for the Protestant-Unionist refusal to want to join a united Ireland was generated by the hard reality that there was no policy with which Irish nationalists could hope to change that situation. Only peaceful persuasion could conceivably change the political outlook of the Six County Protestant-Unionists.

But experience all over the world has shown that peaceful persuasion can not eradicate the consciousness of national or religio-national identity, or persuade one of the antagonists in such a conflict to adopt the identity of the other.

All that could conceivably be done about Northern Ireland was the transfer of the Catholic majority areas, including Derry City, to the Catholic Nationalist state. 26 Counties government leader Michael Collins had vainly appealed to the Belfast government in 1922 to transfer those areas to the Republic.

In any case, the swift conforming of the 26 county state to the worst Orange fears that "Home Rule would be Rome Rule" further encouraged and hardened the Northern Ireland Unionists to resist a united Ireland.

In 1957, in the same period as one of the Trotskyist discussions reported in this pamphlet, the "Fethard boycott" dramatised that dimension.

The local Catholic priest, with support from his bishop and support or compliance from almost all the Catholics in the village of Fethard-on-Sea, Co. Wexford, organised a boycott of Protestant-owned businesses and farms there. The local Protestant (Church of Ireland) school was forced to close, and the local piano teacher, a Protestant, lost her students.

The reason was just that one local Protestant woman married to a Catholic man had refused to enrol her older daughter in the Catholic school. She quit the village rather than comply, moved to Scotland, was eventually reconciled with her husband, and educated her children at home.

There was always also an element in the impasse of some Catholics wanting the freedom to have their own Catholic state unencumbered by a need to take one million and more Protestants into account; but that was a subordinate element; at the beginning anyway.

As the constitutional republican De Valera progressively eliminated the areas of nationalist grievance against England – the Oath of Allegiance to the British king, the paying back of debt by the farmers who had bought their land with the help of the British Exchequer, British Naval bases – the physical force Republicans were politically disarmed. There remained only "the Six Counties", Partition.

THE "TWO NATIONS" AND A LITTLE LOYAL (MAYBE) ORANGE EMPIRE

There were about half a million Catholic nationalists in the six county sub-state. For some of them, the sizeable Catholic minority in Belfast for instance, their minority status would have been unavoidable in any partition. But most of them formed a majority in large areas along the border

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with the 26 counties.

Their inclusion in the six counties was arbitrary, oppressive and stark denial of the principles under which the Protestant majority areas in north-east Ulster claimed the right not to be part of an all Ireland state. They had been beaten down by the British Army and Protestant-Unionist militias in the first years of the Six Counties sub-state.

There had been discussion before World War I about where exactly a line might be drawn to demarcate a separate Irish state and the part of Ireland that would remain in the United Kingdom. Should four counties, six counties or nine counties be excluded from Ireland's separation?

Four counties would give a massive Protestant majority. Nine counties, that is the whole province of Ulster, would leave the Protestant in a very small and very insecure majority. Six Counties gave a ratio of about two Protestants to one Catholic.

Catholics tended to have larger families than Protestants. For some decades, higher Catholic emigration kept the Protestant:Catholic ratio fairly stable; but that was a chancy thing. Today (when, unlike in the 1920s, a sizeable proportion, 17%, tell the census they have no religion, or refuse to state their religion) the figures are 42% Protestant, 41% Catholic.

Why should the architects of the northern state opt for such a large Catholic population in their "Protestant state for a Protestant people" – and a population that formed the majority in territory contiguous with nationalist Ireland, of which they were naturally a part?

This problem led to much mystification of the nature of Partition. Since the Unionists had done what they did, they must have had a good reason. What was it? For a certain sort of simplistic Marxist, that meant, what was the economic motive?

Maybe industrial Belfast needed a large agricultural hinterland? Maybe the Protestant majority territories were just not large enough to make a viable state?

The theory that the Protestants of north-east Ulster were a distinct nation, widely circulated by some declared Marxists in the 1970s, added further confusion. They falsely read back later conditions onto the conditions that had created them.

And the question of why it had been a six-county, not a four-county or nine-county, partition, added further mystification.

The 26 counties had retreated behind high tariff walls at the beginning of the 1930s. To the economic-determinist "Marxists", this proved that the fear of such tariffs had been the primary motive behind Orange opposition to inclusion in an all island state.

"Marxists" sought for *the* economic explanation.

To understand partition, and why six and not four counties, we must remember that this was a time of empires, of peoples held against their will in states they considered alien. Despite President Woodrow Wilson's talk of "self-determination for nations", the settlement of European affairs in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 created conglomerate states such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia in which a number of minority peoples were held against their will and to various degrees treated as second-class citizens.

The partition settlement was a typical settlement of the time of the Versailles Treaty which sowed the seeds of the Second World War.

Marxists in the 30s referred to conglomerate states such as Czechoslovakia at the time of the Munich crisis, for example, as imperialist.

The minds of those who designed the partition of Ireland were saturated with the imperialist ideas of their time. Their fallback position was to the compact majority of Protestant-Unionists in north-east Ulster; but they desired to get as much as they could of Ireland for their all-Ireland minority "nation".

Also, Unionist leaders like Edward Carson, who had used the threat of partition in order to stop any home rule for any part of Ireland, did not conceive of partition as a permanent settlement.

According to one story, in Frank Gallagher's 1957 book *The Indivisible Island*, during the negotiations on the eve of World War One Edward Carson had tried to persuade the nationalist leader John Redmond to agree to the exclusion from Home Rule of nine counties, arguing that this would be a guarantee that partition could not become permanent. Maybe that was a lawyer using any argument to gain his point. But taking out as many as nine counties did really have that implication.

The idea that there were two nations or two peoples in Ireland was the common coin of 19th century and early 20th

century discourse on the "Irish question". Terms like "the English in Ireland", "the Ulster Scots", or "the Protestant nation" were common.

The Home Rule politician John Redmond wrote a pamphlet in 1886, during discussions about the first Home Rule Bill, entitled *The Two Irish Nations*. (For him, there had been two nations in Ireland, but they had fused around the United Irishmen, many of whom were Protestants).

In the mid-19th century, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the historian of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-9, argued that any sort of Home Rule for Ireland was likely to lead to civil war between the two Irish peoples. The famous economist Walter Bagehot predicted in 1867 that Home Rule in Ireland would quickly produce civil war in which the Northerners would conquer the whole island.

When an Ulster Unionist Council was set up in 1905, to organise Unionist opposition to any sort of Home Rule, that quickly led to the definition of the second nation as the Protestant-Unionists of the Six Counties. In retrospect, after the island had been partitioned, and as the Protestant population of the South declined over time, that definition came to seem only common sense.

In fact, the initial advocates of the idea that there was a second Irish nation meant a people spread all over Ireland. Edward Carson, the main leader of the agitation against Home Rule before World War I and a Southerner, was no partitionist. The threat that Ulster would secede from a Home-Rule majority government in Dublin was seen by its champions not as a defence of local rights, but as a weapon to stop Home Rule for any part of Ireland.

The result was that a little Orange Empire – in the sense that Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and Poland were called imperialist by the Marxists of that time – complete with its own oppressed minority, was created in Northern Ireland.

Even six counties, for anyone who wanted a permanent partition, was a grotesque mistake. But it was a mistake which was a typical product of its times.

So, by the 1940s, when De Valera's programme of incremental independence for the 26 Counties was complete, Northern Ireland was still a live hearth of grievance.

THE 1956-62 BORDER CAMPAIGN

For Republicans, Stalinists, and Stalino-Republicans, the focus came to be on denouncing Northern Ireland as a police state for its treatment of the Catholic minority.

There was much to denounce. But the fundamental fact that a million Protestant-Unionists, the compact majority in north-east Ulster though not in the whole Six Counties, wanted partition, got buried in a mixture of agitation (more or less truthful, as far as it went) against the Orange police state and in the self-deceiving pretence that Britain is the main opponent of a united Ireland.

The "Irish question" became narrowed down to the partition question, and the partition question was interpreted as only a superficially different version of the old Britain-vs-Ireland "Irish question".

The immediate background to the debate in 1957-8 surveyed in this pamphlet was the IRA's "Border Campaign" of 1956-62.

On 12 December 1956, the "Irish Republican Army", then a small illegal group based mainly in the 26 Counties, launched what would be known as "The Border Campaign" against the Protestant-Unionist-majority sub-state in north-east Ireland.

The Belfast Parliament at Stormont Castle had limited powers and was subordinate to Westminster. In practice the convention was that the Westminster Parliament never discussed internal Six County affairs, and left them all in the hands of Belfast. In practice, Six County majority rule meant Protestant-sectarian rule over a beaten down Catholic-nationalist minority.

The IRA's first martyrs in that campaign, Sean South and Fergal O'Hanlon (a boy in his teens) died 20 days after the start of the IRA offensive, in a raid from the 26 into the Six Counties on 1 January 1957. Their funerals, as the coffins made their way across Ireland, produced a tremendous outpouring of nationalist grief and implicitly of support for the political objectives of the two dead men and their organisation. To some degree for their actions, too: the outpouring of sentiment included no disapproval of the raid in which they died.

Soon a ballad about "Sean South of Garryowen" was the most popular song in Ireland. Another song, "The Patriot Game," about Fergal O'Hanlon, also became very popular. The author of both these songs, Dominic Behan, participated

in the socialist debate of 1957-8 surveyed here.

The 26 counties had had self-government for only three and a half decades. There were many who remembered and had participated, actively or passively, in the War of Independence of 1919-21 against the British forces of occupation. Especially since the late 1940s, Dublin governments, both Fianna Fail, and Fine Gael-Labour coalitions, had generated a tremendous propaganda campaign against Partition and the continued "British occupation" of the Six Counties.

The 26 counties schools taught exactly the same version of ancient and modern Irish history as that propagated by Sinn Fein and the IRA. The guerrillas seemed to act, and many of them saw themselves as acting, on what the government merely talked and agitated about. Naturally there was tremendous sympathy in the country for them, and many were prepared to help them if only by doing nothing to hinder them.

When the IRA's Border Campaign started, the coalition government in power included Clann na Phoblachta, a small political party rooted in the IRA of the late 1930s and early 1940s – a second edition of Fianna Fail, which had its roots in the IRA of the Civil War of the early 1920s. Clann na Phoblachta's presence in the government meant that the 26 county state could not take drastic action to quell the IRA and its war on the six counties. Clann na Phoblachta would bring down the coalition government in mid-1957 rather than use effective coercion against the IRA.

Support among Northern Ireland Catholics for the Border campaign was rarely more than passive. The leaders of the Campaign had decided against any action in Belfast, lest it stir up murderous sectarian animosities.

An important segment of the IRA-Sinn Fein were overt clerical fascists, members and sympathisers of Maria Duce, whose leader, Father Dennis Fahey, had edited and published an edition of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (under the title *Waters Flowing Eastward*).

The Border Campaign was distinguished from the sporadic weapons-gathering raids of the previous four years by a sharp increase in the number of attacks on police and British army barracks along the border and by the fact that offensive action was itself now the objective, rather than a means to the end of weapons-gathering. But the intensified raids soon died down almost to the pre-1956 level of IRA activity; and even at the height of the Campaign the difference was one of degree, not of kind.

De Valera's constitutional republican party, Fianna Fail, had repressed the IRA with great brutality in the early 1940s, killing some of them. When De Valera won the General Election in July 1957 he reintroduced internment – indefinite imprisonment without formal charge or trial. More than 100 young men were locked up in an internment camp at the Curragh, Co. Kildare. They could secure their release by formally promising that in future they would abide by the law, but Republicans would not make such a declaration.

After De Valera started interning Republicans in 1957, the Campaign petered out into occasional raids until it was formally called off in March 1962.

The most important effect of the Border Campaign was its political effect on politics in the 26 Counties.

Sinn Fein was able to hold large meetings throughout the South. In the General election of March 1957, Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, stood 19 candidates for the Dail, saved all their deposits, won 65,000 votes. and gained four seats, which they then refused to take because of their principle of abstention from the "Partitionist Parliaments".

All that was the background to the debate among socialists in 1957-8. It also helped shape the conditions of the socialist debate of 1968-9, triggered by the eruption of a big civil rights movement among Northern Ireland Catholics and its clash with Orange state repression.

Some of the leaders of the Border Campaign would become Stalinists in the 60s, triggering the breakaway of the Provisional IRA in December 1969. A few of the participants would in England become "Trotskyists". One of these, a once-devout member of Maria Duce, would play an important part in the "second discussion" on Ireland by the Cliff group (Socialist Review-IS-SWP) at the end of the 60s.

MARXISM AND IRELAND

Revolutionary Marxism is a way of looking at the world, analysing it and changing it.

It embodies certain key basic ideas. While we recognise the politically very important semi-autonomy of culture, we believe in the ultimate priority of the mode of production in



A mural in Belfast on a “peace wall” dividing Catholic and Protestant areas

shaping society, including in the last analysis its ideas; the class struggle; and the centrality of the working class in modern history.

Marxism deals with an ever-changing reality. There is no rest, no finality. Reality moves, permutes, is transformed. The best texts of Marxism “age” and become progressively divorced from the evolved reality whose ancestor, so to speak, they captured.

There can be no “sacred texts”. To treat any of the texts of Marxism, the past judgements of Marxists, as embodying supra-historical truth, is to break with the basic mindset of Marxism and to transform attempted works of science into quasi-religious objects of veneration. To the degree that such texts are worshipped instead of being critically reviewed, used, worked over, they lose whatever power they had to illuminate reality and thus help us in the work of changing it. We kill or fail to develop the capacity in ourselves to use the tools of Marxism, to be Marxists and not parrots.

The Marxists whose work is now venerated worked differently. Marxism was a method of analysing concrete reality. Previous Marxist attempts to analyse the same or antecedent reality offered guides, models, ideas, comparisons for the working, thinking, living Marxists.

In truth, of course, everyone thinks about the world, even the religious text-worshippers, even if they hold that Marx or Lenin or Trotsky — or Stalin or Mao — was infallible and can tell us directly about the world of today, which came into existence after they died. What the dogmatist usually does in practice is pragmatically and impressionistically take an attitude on current events and then find the right “quotes” to dress it up.

Much of socialist discourse on Ireland shows at its worst this process of Marxism being atrophied into a set of shibboleths, dead forms of words, filled with alien content.

Marx and Engels analysed Ireland. They died; Ireland changed. Partial analyses of aspects of Ireland’s evolution were made by later Marxists influenced by Marx and Engels. Ireland evolved into two bourgeois states. And there, frozen at the point when the Communist International died as a Marxist, working-class organisation, “Marxism” on Ireland stopped.

Comments and analyses of Marx and Lenin (Lenin’s, I believe, radically wrong at the start: see my article on Lenin on Ireland in *Workers’ Liberty* 22-23, 1995) became timeless truths of the Stalinist church and gained wide influence by merging with left-wing petty-bourgeois Republicanism.

“Trotskyists” who thought they had done their duty as Marxists if they re-labelled what the Stalinists called “completing the bourgeois revolution” and straight Republicans called “reunifying Ireland” as “Permanent Revolution” instead, have been a part, and not the least influential part, of this process.

Nobody who knows both Irish reality and Trotsky’s theory of “Permanent Revolution” could believe “Permanent Revolution” has any bearing on Irish politics! I have never in 50 years found anyone able to argue for its seriously. But many Trotskyists “believe” it. It is the common dogma, functioning as a licence for playing the chameleon to petty bourgeois nationalism.

Marxists, if they are Marxists, must draw from life, not from the dead or half-dead reflection of ever-changing life in old analyses. And they must, above all, learn from history.

1948: Irish Trotskyists call for a united Ireland with autonomy for the Protestant northeast

The leaflet below was produced by the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Ireland in 1948. The RSP was a Trotskyist group, the Irish section of the official Fourth International at the time, formed by a merger of previous small groups in early 1944, and having about 20 members.

The RSP briefly published a weekly newspaper, the *Workers’ Republic*, but it ran out of money after six issues, and circulated literature from the British and US Trotskyists.

In the arguments among Trotskyists in the 1940s over Stalinism, they sided with Max Shachtman and the Workers’ Party of the USA.

The RSP collapsed in the difficult conditions of the late 1940s, but a former member, Matt Merrigan, was prominent in the Irish labour The “coalition” referred to is the Dublin government formed after the February 1948 election in the 26 Counties, in which the Irish Labour Party joined as junior partners to Fine Gael.

Labour must withdraw from the Coalition!

An Emergency Conference of the branches must be called to repudiate the leaders and demand their withdrawal. If on being directed to withdraw, they refuse — expulsion must follow.

Full support must be given to this policy by Northern Ireland Labour. The workers’ interests can be defended only against all capitalist parties.

An all-Ireland conference should be called, giving representation and voice to all working-class tendencies, for the formulation of a programme linking the fight against partition with the anti-capitalist struggle.

1. Complete political independence from Britain. Transfer of the Westminster powers to a United Dail.

2. A wide degree of Protestant autonomy in Northern Ireland.

3. Restore all civil liberties. Full religious freedom and tolerance. No clerical intrusion into politics!

4. Solidarity with all peoples oppressed by British imperialism, Russia, or any other power. No secret commitments to Anglo-American imperialism.

5. Workers’ Control in industry.

6. Finance housing and full employment at the expense of profits and rents.

• Other documents of the RSP available are a two-part survey of Northern Ireland by Bob Armstrong in the magazine of the British RCP, *Workers’ International News*, in 1945, and an article on James Connolly from 1947 (www.workersliberty.org/node/18659). The “Theses of the Irish Trotskyists” in *Fourth International* (New York), in the 1940s, were extracted from the *WIN* articles.

There has been one other sustained debate on the left about Ireland: in Socialist Organiser (forerunner of Solidarity) in 1983. That debate, together with a dialogue exploring the issues, is available online at www.workersliberty.org/node/8150

The Irish Trotskyists on trade-union unity in the 1940s

Below is a leaflet produced by the Revolutionary Socialist Party, which was then the (small) Irish section of the Fourth International, some time soon after the splitting of the Irish trade union movement (Irish TUC) in 1945 by Irish Transport and General Workers' Union leader William O'Brien and his allies.

Protesting against alleged "British domination" in the Irish TUC, they formed a separate Congress of Irish Unions, made up solely of Irish-based unions, and rejecting unions which organised both in Britain and in Ireland. The split would be healed in 1959, with the formation of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

There had previously (1944) been a split in the trade union-based Irish Labour Party, to form the National Labour Party, of which O'Brien was also a leader. The NLP complained of "communist domination" in the main Labour Party. In 1950, it merged back into the Labour Party.

TUC Betrayed! The present impasse in the TUC is not essentially a recent development, as the O'Brienite oppositionists try to infer. To the uninitiated, much less the sycophants in the anti-split bloc, the strategy was obvious through episodic tactics of O'Brien & Co. for at least six years.

There is an old saying that we are always wiser after an event, that [it] is quite easy to adumbrate a tendency, when it has manifested itself. The corollary doesn't hold in this in-

stance. To the people in the know, the launching of the Council of Irish Unions as a national faction inside the TUC as far back as 1939 (the year the Vocational Commission convened) should have been stigmatised as a reactionary tendency. The Council was inspired by O'Brien & Co. to allegedly fulfill the aspirations of purely Irish Unions. This platitude is absurd when we recollect that the TUC at that period was controlled by O'Brien & Co. and his philosophic "Yes-men".

The creation of the Council of Irish Unions inside of a body that was representative of the aspirations of the workers of the 32 Counties, regardless of the National origin of their organisations, was superfluous to say the least. The outbreak of the Imperialist War presented O'Brien & Co. with the precondition for the atomisation of the Trade Union Movement. The anomalous situation in the TUC, as representative of 32 Counties, six of whom were belligerents, and as such were rather embarrassing to the ruling-clique in the 26 Counties who were formally neutral, was very opportunistically exploited by O'Brien & Co. as the pivot around which the split tendency revolved. O'Brien & Co. bearing out the contention of complete subserviency to the Capitalist class, emphasised that the Stormont junta failed to give its blessing to the Irish TUC, thus proposing to sacrifice the thousand of organised workers in the 6 Counties, as a sacrificial gift, for the greater prerogative of the incontestable hegemony of the TUC, when the 6 County membership was denied the Amalgamated Unions operating in Ireland.

The far-seeing Irish bourgeoisie, as the bourgeoisie of all lands, visualise the sharpening class conflicts proceeding from Capitalism in its epoch of decay, are preparing for the inevitable social explosions that will characterise the immediate period ahead. An Irish working-class in National isolation, its organisations controlled by autocratic ruling class agents of the O'Brien & Co. gender, would be completely defenceless in the face of the inevitable assaults that they intend to launch. Mr Lemass's characterisation in recent speeches, of this post-war policy, i.e., "Trade Union Co-operation in Industry," "Work Harder," etc., in actuality means "Open Shops", "Non Recognition of Trade Union Rights", "Wage Slashing", etc., presages the post-war catastrophic period of Bourgeois Democracy.

DEGENERATION

Once again the "Labour Lieutenants" of the Capitalist class, have performed for their bourgeois task-masters the ever-green tragedy of betrayal, on the working-class stage.

Bearing out the prognosis of all militant and far-seeing workers, O'Brien & Co., after decades of preparation and manoeuvre, have finally consummated the filthy and perfidious strategy of atomisation in the Irish Working-Class Movement.

Illusions have been entertained by large masses of organised workers, that the present break-up of the TUC proceeded in the first instance from personal animosity, i.e. the Labour Bosses cannot agree amongst themselves; disunity due to egotism, etc. Fundamentally, it is not a question of personal dislikes, although personal issues due enter at specific stages. On the whole, the disintegration of the TUC is more profound, more reactionary, than a clique fight among the Bureaucracy. It is precisely the question of the total disintegration of the Trade Unions and their complete subserviency and integration to the Capitalist State machine.

THE RISE OF THE BUREAUCRACY

The Trade Unions, in their embryonic stage in this country as elsewhere, had to wage an irreconcilable struggle against the Bosses and Capitalist ruling-class of that period.

As a consequence of this intransigent and independent struggle against all the ideological opponents of the working-class, large masses of the exploited flocked to the Unions. Purely on the basis of a militant fighting leadership did the

ranks of the Unions swell. The dominant Unit was the ITGWU, as the organisational position crystallised, as with all other Unions a new social grouping, as a result of their divorcement from the organised Rank and File, their dread of Democracy as a challenge to their fat salaries and lucrative perquisites, became a fetter on the forces they misrepresented. Too spineless to wage an independent fight against the Bosses, they crawled to the State power (whom they consider as an impartial agent) to seek the protection of the State against the workers they were battering on, and, on the other hand, their eventual liquidation by the Bosses.

THE SHACKLING TACTIC

This integration and shackling of the Trade Unions to the Capitalist State apparatus, demagogically called legalisation by the Bureaucrats, prostrated the Working-Class before the Governmental and Employers' assaults, culminating in the Trade Union Act and Standstill on Wages.

The Bureaucrats sold out after a sham battle, when pious resolutions affirming their independence as social organisms were moved and passed at numerous meetings; the sycophants who peddled these pious fighting resolutions were the first to register their organisation and toe the Government line.

VOCATIONALISM

In line with the general pattern of the polarisation of the English Unions, the decimation of the Working Class political solidarity, we have initially the Vocational Commissions' report laying down the incompatibility of International Trade Unionism and Vocationalism.

Secondly, we have the inspired breakaway from the Labour Party of the National Labour Party. Now we have its industrial counterpart, the Council of Irish Unions, all serving to redirect the leftward swinging workers into the Fianna Fáil camp.

CONCLUSION

Workers, you must draw the lessons from this new position in your movement.

This betrayal by the misleaders of the Working Class is no moralistic phenomenon, no National peculiarity; it is characteristic of Trade Union degeneration, the capitulation of the Bureaucrats and the Labour Aristocracy to the class enemy.

At this stage it is O'Brien & Co., when they have fulfilled their role as "Gauleiters" of the Capitalist class, they will be ignominiously cast aside and possibly the O'Brienite oppositionists will play a similar role, assuming that the historical and objective circumstances coincide. They also will be flung into the ash can of history when their period of usefulness has passed.

Make no mistake, the Bureaucrats of the TUC, when the Government puts on the "screws", will sell out. They have forgotten how to fight, they cannot rally the workers, because the workers are disgusted with the whole Trade Union set-up. They have no time for the O'Briens, the Larkins, Lynch's, Colgans and Dromgooles, the sell-out policy, the Bureaucratic indifference; the whole unprincipled mess nauseates them. Make no mistake, the present sabotage of the TUC is a definite policy to render impotent the Working Class in the period of disintegrating Capitalism.

When the rest of the world is surging towards Socialism, when Socialism is on the order of the day, the period of reaction and barbaric Fascism will be in its advent in Ireland!

For a democratically elected Irish executive for all English unions, still retaining international affiliations!

Greater democracy in all unions! Down with bureaucracy! The organisation of shop stewards and factory committees to canalise the militancy of the rank and file!

For complete independence of the trade unions from the capitalist state apparatus!

The Bolsheviks on national minorities

"In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit making and strife; it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government . . . the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority..."

"This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc."

(1913 Resolution of the Bolshevik Party Central Committee).

A Marxist surveys mid-50s Ireland

Matt Merrigan in Labor Action, 1955-57

Matt Merrigan was a member of the small Irish Trotskyist group in the 1940s, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and a socialist all his life. He eventually became president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, and died in 2000.

In the mid-50s, for a while, he wrote reports on Ireland for *Labor Action*, the paper of the Independent Socialist League of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, and others in the USA.

Matt Merrigan's first article on Ireland for *Labor Action* was on 19 September 1955. There had been nothing in 1954 *Labor Action*. His reappearance coincided with an obvious quickening of links, or a re-forging of links, or establishment of close links, between the ISL and Socialist Review (the group in Britain at the time led by Tony Cliff). I think Max Shachtman, or somebody, visited.

There were five items in 1955, six in 1956 and one in 1957. The last appearance was dated 29 April 1957.

Before Merrigan, you have to go back to 9 April 1951 for any comment at all in *Labor Action* on Ireland, a commemorative piece reprinted from the British ILP paper, *Socialist Leader*, by Dick Beach, one of James Connolly's sons-in-law.

1. Labor Action 19 September 1955

Behind the IRA's commando raids. Festering sore: the partition of Ireland

The Irish and English papers in the last few weeks have featured the Irish Republican Army's raids on British military installations as precursors of an all-out campaign to focus world attention on the continued partition of Ireland by Britain.

The raid on Arborfield Barracks in Berkshire, England, by IRA commandos; and the removal of thousands of rounds of ammunition and a quantity of machine guns threw the British security forces into a state of nerves. Military and police activity recalled the 1939-41 bomb campaign by the IRA in English cities which culminated in hangings and prison sentences for IRA activists.

Petty bourgeois and fringed with fascists, the leadership of the IRA and Sinn Fein (its political mouthpiece) is a conspiratorial cloak and dagger sect. Its basic approach to national unity is emotional and hysterical. It proclaims that its mission is preordained and holy by virtue of its opposition to British Imperialism. But it lacks an elementary understanding of the international role of imperialism in general, and is wholly out of touch with the social and national struggles of other colonial peoples.

The commando-like raids in Britain were preceded by attacks across the border into Northern Ireland. But the problem at being confronted by armed fellow-Irishmen of the British army garrison in Northern Ireland was a propaganda difficulty unlikely to be encountered by attacks in Britain proper. Also in Britain the Irish, northern and southern, enjoy the same rights as British subjects and among the millions of emigrant Irish in Britain the IRA finds a fruitful field for sympathisers and recruits in the very heart of enemy territory.

Repressive police measures against even moderate nationalists domiciled in Northern Ireland makes the extra-legal activity at the IRA doubly difficult in what is termed the

occupied sectors of the country. Hence the actions in Britain.

Socialist influence in the ranks of the IRA and Sinn Fein is non-existent. Connolly's association with the independence movement 40 years ago is hailed by them today as a vindication of their "progressiveness". Connolly's Marxist approach to the national question is misrepresented as having been super-patriotic and chauvinist.

The political labour movement as represented by the Labour Party in Ireland has no principled position on the anti-partition struggle. Therefore its attitude toward the IRA and its physical-force policy is utterly opportunist. It seeks for purely parliamentary reasons to identify itself (but not too closely) with the anti-British chauvinism that the IRA evokes. But one waits vainly for a statement on the matter from the government of the Republic in which the Labour Party holds four ministries, including Justice, which would be charged with combating the "illegal" IRA in the Republic.

It is reported that a "pact" between the government and the IRA has been concluded in which the "blind eye" is turned to the IRA's extraterritorial activities in return for "hands off" the authority and institutions of the Republic (which the IRA characterises as a creature of British imperialism) in whose parliament they refuse to sit. (One should bear in mind, of course, the fact that they have not won even one seat in the House of Representatives [An Dail].)

The Trade Union Congress as distinct from the nominal claim of the Labour Party is a genuine all-Ireland body, being the trade union centre for both States. It is not recognised by the Northern Ireland authorities by virtue of this supra-border complexion. It nevertheless retain its homogeneity in an industrial sense by avoiding the national question or the constitutional position of the two States.

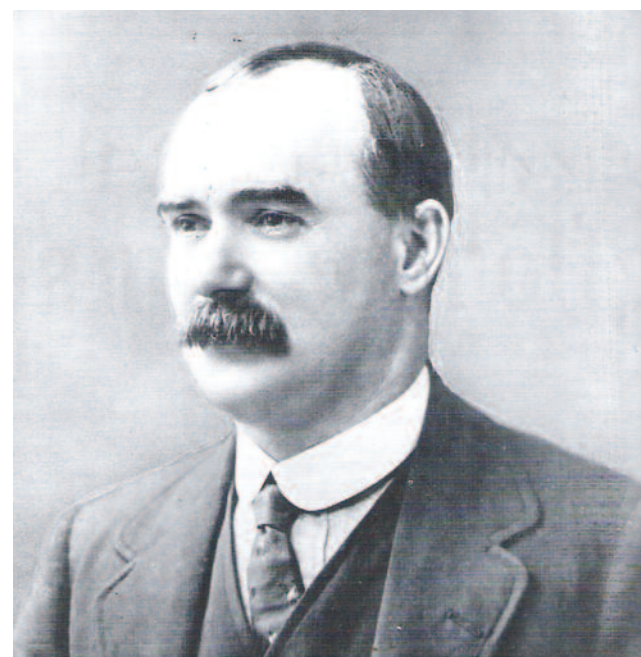
To retain this unity means being completely pragmatic; and in deference to the unions with members in Northern Ireland, the Congress affords a measure of autonomy via a Northern Ireland Committee of the TUC which concerns itself with problems peculiar to its State.

Labour unity is sorely hampered by the national question. A small centre for purely Irish unions exists in the Republic alongside the TUC. It represents a breakaway from the TUC some ten years ago over a charge of the domination of the Irish TUC by English unions (unions which were English by origin and extended their activities to Ireland) which were claimed to have a quasi-imperialist orientation. There is a germ of substance in this claim, for without a doubt these amalgamated unions recruited Irish labour for the war effort, and were assisted by the Stalinists to this end.

However the basic leadership of this nationalist centre is incorrigibly sectarian nationalist, and basically petty bourgeois in politics, though a few of its leaders still sentimentally, and for mostly corrupt reasons continue their membership in the Labour Party.

Northern Ireland capitalists, represented by shipbuilding and linens, believe that union with Britain serves their interests better than membership in an Irish Republic. Perhaps when Britain led the world's manufacturing race and the Empire banked in economic sunshine while the colonial peoples perished in the shade there was some substance to this attitude. But today with Britain losing her edge in textiles and shipbuilding the economic backwater of Northern Ireland is fast becoming a stagnant pool. Yet the Tory Unionist Party is as intransigent on the question of union as it was 30 years ago when it came to power.

Nevertheless, it still can, by manipulating anti-Catholic and anti-Republican prejudices, command a mass following even in periods of mass unemployment. The militant politico-religious protestant Orange Order provides a fanatical loyalist counterweight to the threats of Republican fanaticism. Added to this a very efficient gerrymandering of electoral areas which precludes the emergence of either a Nationalist or Labour opposition in the Northern Ireland parliament.



James Connolly

The Machiavellian role of the Catholic Church in the politics of the Republic and the threats of violence by the IRA extremists lend substance to the claims of the Tory Unionists that Northern Ireland citizens in an all-Ireland Republic would be second-class, and thereby consolidate the Unionists at every turn. The threats of the IRA justify the Northern regime in ruling by emergency powers and retaining an armed semi-military police force, which intimidates even the most moderate political critics of the regime.

Westminster exercises absolute control over fiscal defence and social policies in Northern Ireland with the exception of the policing of the area which is prerogative of the Northern Ireland Minister for Home Affairs, who in his own immediate political interests can be relied upon to do a good job.

The Republic, which extends over four-fifths of the island, is ruled at the moment by a coalition composed of extreme right, centre and the left-centre Labour Party, with de Valera's populist party in opposition. The Republic has its own institutions, and accredited representatives abroad.

The economy of the Republic is basically agricultural with a light manufacturing industry dependent on the importation of raw materials from abroad, and a processing industry ancillary to some agricultural products like sugar beet growing and the manufacture of sugar, barley for brewing and distilling, etc. A miserable under-capitalisation, primarily in agriculture, with the volume of production remaining fairly stagnant, begets an impoverished and under-employed rural proletariat who leave the country of the rate of 10,000 to 20,000 per year for Britain (where jobs are chasing men) and for other countries, mostly Canada and the United States.

Some secondary causes drive young people for the most part into emigration: (1) The restrictive and coercive role of parents toward youthful exuberance, and the desire to wed without necessarily having the accommodations or the means to live on the basis of the peasant proprietorship of the parents. (2) The all-pervading clerical influence that isolates and exercises social and domestic pressures on young people who betray any sign of non-conformism in politics, philosophy or literary tastes.

It is against this background, then, that the nationalist demagoguery of the IRA and Sinn Fein seeks to win the allegiance of the revolutionary youth (with a measure of success) for a chauvinist and petty bourgeois concept of national unity. To this extent this demagoguery has found a response in quasi-so-

Trotskyists debate Ireland

cialist circles and among Labour elements, and for want of a faith in the efficacy of socialist action, they have drifted towards if not an open justification of physical force and direct action, then an acquiescence in the use of these methods by the anti-socialist, anti-democratic IRA and Sinn Fein.

With the emergency of an influential and anti-imperialist current in the Irish Labour Party the Irish working class movement could take the initiative on the unity question.

Without the Imperial Preference that Northern Ireland enjoys, and the tremendous financial assistance from the British exchequer, the artificially inflated economy and the social services (which paradoxically are a monument to the British Labour Party administration, implemented by the Tory Unionist government in Northern Ireland to justify their integral position in the United Kingdom though politically galling to them) would collapse like a pricked bubble if British patronage ceased in Northern Ireland.

However, considerations like Northern Ireland's strategic position as part of NATO's military network are not absent from Britain's (and quite possibly America's) attitude, because of the possibility of a united Ireland staying outside current military alignments.

If one can offer an opinion on this vexing question it is this: in any solution that can be found, cognisance must be taken of the intangible elements like loyalty to forms of religious beliefs and cultural and traditional ties of the dissident local majority and national minority in what is now Northern Ireland. The broadest democratic and political rights must be afforded what would be a minority in the national context. Sinn Fein and the IRA would coerce the will and force the consent of the citizens of the area, and would undoubtedly police it for a whole period in an attempt to exorcise what they would consider treasonable and heretical loyalties, as does the regime in Northern Ireland today vis-a-vis the Nationalists.

Only a socialist-led working class party could give these democratic guarantees to the workers of Northern Ireland on the basis of an economic communion: a basic identity of social and economic interests, in collaboration with a real socialist Labour Government at Westminster. Any interim settlement must be a federal one, where each state would be locally autonomous and yet subscribe to a national objective.

2. Labor Action 3 October 1955

Irish Labourites on the griddle

Dublin, 6 September. Dubliners are facing a shut-down of the city's gas and transport services at the weekend when strike notices expire.

The strike notices were handed in by "Larkin's union" — the Workers Union of Ireland (WUI) — for a wage boost of 15 per cent. The WUI has spearheaded what is known as the "fifth round" of wage increases, which takes its name from the number of increases conceded since the statutory restrictions on wages ended in 1947.

The Labor Court (an official conciliation-court without legal powers) has become so discredited that even the most conservative union officers refuse to use it. In the circumstances, Industry and Commerce Minister Norton has been forced to convene a conference of both employers' and workers' organizations to attempt to shore up its falling prestige.

It is obvious that the government sees the impending economic storm and that Norton, the Labor handmaid of the government, has been given the dirty task of urging wage restraint on the unions. Clearly the "fifth round" may be the death knell of the government. The "Pull Down Prices" program of the Labor Party when it joined the government has proved to be an empty gimmick to justify fat jobs for the boys.

Further political storms are blowing-up. Last fall, world tea prices began to soar, and the government, under pressure from the Labor Party, gambled on a price fall within the year, and subsidized the existing price by \$4 million. But the price didn't fall, and if the capitalist minister of Finance has his way there will be a 20 per cent rise in the present price of 75 cents per pound. If this happens, a revolt in the ranks of the Labor Party seems certain.

Labor in the government is committed to the full imple-

mentation of De Valera's Social Health Act of 1953. This finds an echo in the fall of the last coalition in 1951. A united front of Catholic bishops and the Irish Medical Association (IMA) at that time killed a more progressive measure piloted by the petty-bourgeois radical Dr. Browne. The De Valera government that took office that year under pressure from Browne & Co (who held the balance of power) resurrected the bill in a watered-down form; but again the bishops and the IMA succeeded in delaying portions of the act. The Labor Party is again committed to the "implementation in full of the 1953 Health Act."

It will be interesting to watch the Labor strategists manoeuvre to keep their lush jobs by avoiding an open break with the reactionary ministers in the cabinet on this issue.

3. Labor Action 17 October 1955

Irish flirt with German finance

In a recent speech in Germany, Norton, Labor's Minister for Industry in the government coalition, indicated the Irish government's desire to facilitate the investment of German industrial capital in Ireland.

Sharp criticism of the proposals came from British capitalist circles, and underlined the imperial preference enjoyed by Ireland under several trade pacts. Warnings were issued that any attempt to allow German capital to penetrate Britain's market via the Irish back door would necessitate a review of the Irish trade position. This would be a severe body-blow to the Irish economy.

Another situation the development of which has a tremendous bearing on the Irish economy is the proposed absorption of Denmark into the British Commonwealth. In terms of bacon, butter, eggs, dairy and farm produce, rearrangement following on this constitutional alignment would mean a virtual squeeze out of Irish produce from British markets.

But an element of balance introduced into the lopsided industrial economy of Britain would be of inestimable value to Britain, and could well help to solve her balance of payments position.

Strike threats

The expected shut-down of transport and gas services in the city mentioned in my last letter did not take place.

At the eleventh hour the intervention of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin in the gas dispute led to further talks between the unions and the employers and the eventual acceptance by the workers of a contract only differing in a minor degree (question of retroactive payment for two weeks) from the original terms offered, i.e., increases ranging from 8 per cent to 10 per cent in basic rates.

Transport workers agreed to await the findings of the Labor Court. The court recommended the employers pay increases up to 12 per cent of basic wages.

The members of two out of three transport unions in the city's services accepted the court's recommendation. The third union, the Workers Union of Ireland (WUI), rejected the recommendation, though it is reported that the National Executive will recommend its acceptance, because the WUI have a minority of transport workers.

Another strike threat, if given effect, will assume the character of a general strike, by the Fitters or Engineers (Machinists). These men maintain and service all mechanized operations in transport, power, newspapers, airways, hospitals, etc. Anywhere a machine runs, it runs by virtue of these men. A strike of this kind could paralyze the country.

Cosmic Truth

From the plough to the stars! The International Astronomical Association held its 1955 conference in Dublin. A six-man Russian delegation, together with several colonial stooge delegations from East Europe lent a personal touch to the new-look Kremlin strategy.

The leader of the delegation in his only public utterance referred to the "warm friendship that existed always between the Russians and Irish peoples." Yet repeated Russian vetoes have kept Ireland out of the UN! Cosmic truth has nothing to

do with Stalinist illusion.

The unfortunate plight of the Stalinist scientists was underscored by an article in the *Sunday Press* which confirmed the attendance of at least one known MVD agent "seeded" into the Rumanian delegation. At the same time the front of the Russo-Irish peace offensive was somewhat dented when the Irish authorities (no doubt acting under orders from the ecclesiastical centre) refused Russian ambassador to Britain Jacob Malik a visa to visit Dublin during the conference.

4. Labor Action 7 November 1955

Irish Laborites under attack for coalition collaboration policy

Dublin, 12 October. The coalition government in Ireland is losing some sleep over the economic crisis which is daily gathering momentum, with inflation and the price-wage spiral having their effect on the workers' standards.

The cornerstone of the government is threatened by the militant attitude of the unions as the latter seek to preserve their wage positions. Labor Party elements in the coalition are wincing at the arm-twisting technique of the unions.

These Laborites are attempting to allay the mounting criticism against their wretched policy of collaboration with the clerical-ridden reactionaries of Fine Gael (United Ireland), through a series of articles in the weekly tabloid *Times Pictorial* justifying continued support for the government.

It is abundantly clear that these Labor politicians are doing their damndest to hold down their fat jobs in the administration and perhaps a ministerial pension as well after years in office. The continued support of the government must be decided by a policy resolution at the party's annual conference next year. Hence the "theoretical" smokescreen for the membership.

The Stalinist undercover-men in the Labor Party's Dublin organization have in this connection emerged as the "radical" theoreticians of MacDonaldism, i.e., of coalitionism. And the pay-off? It is membership, in this, that and the other governmental commissions where Labor ministers have influence, in consideration of dirty chores done.

On the other hand, the official Stalinist organization, the Irish Workers League, has come out in its organ *Workers' Voice* with devastating "Third Period" attacks on the coalition.

Yet their darling, Deputy Jim Larkin (who scorns their open political advances), has consistently acted as a left cover for the wretchedly corrupt right-wing leaders. He has all but claimed his mantle of political respectability, and it seems unlikely that the Stalinists will ever again get near enough to derobe him and lay bare his former association with the Stalinist movement in this country of some 20 years ago.

Reached a crisis

It is evident that the Irish Labor Party has reached a crisis in its evolution. Economic and political events are posing the question of a radical transformation of the economic and social basis of Irish society: the undercapitalisation of the land and industry; unemployment and mass emigration as a permanent feature of the economy; the demagogic appeal by the biggest of the two conservative parties (De Valera's) for the erection of a welfare state to disorient working class support for the Labor Party; the clerical stranglehold that virtually robs parliament of its sovereignty and makes a part-fiction of adult suffrage; and the threat to democracy and a free working class inherent in the neofascist-putschist IRA.

The conservatism of the Labor leadership allows the two capitalist parties to continue the fiction of independent existence, and dissipates the energies of the working class on the "lesser evil" merry-go-round.

The once-revolutionary bourgeoisie here has exhausted its mission in Ireland, in spite of the "new look" five-year plan of De Valera's party (which this correspondent will discuss in a later article). Only the vista of socialism can call up the energy, the dynamism, the capacity for struggle, the ideological and physical motive forces for a further push along the road of human progress and freedom in Ireland. This is the practical issue that is never faced by the Realpolitikers of the Irish Labor Party.

5. Labor Action 5 December 1955

In Ireland two rival labor centres are merging

Dublin, 16 November. Moves are afoot to unite the two trade-union centres — the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Congress of Irish Unions (CIU). Next January, delegate conferences of both centres will discuss a joint unity document after ten years of separate existence.

The political and psychological conditions attendant on the split in 1945 are now virtually non-existent. The political monopoly of De Valera from 1932 to 1948 has been broken.

Lemass, De Valera's lieutenant, when faced with a political radicalization of the workers in the early war years, exploited a bitter personal quarrel in the leadership of the TUC. It is assumed generally that Lemass conspired with right-wing leaders to break away, by promises of political patronage, in their aims to snatch the membership of the so-called "English" unions. The substance of this claim is that the 1941 Trade Union Act gave the Irish unions legal powers to put comparable "English" unions out of business. Therefore those elements who connived with Lemass needed some "principled" justification to start member-snatching.

It was obvious that to exploit their position under the law, Irish union leaders with unscrupulous designs on "English" union members had to leave the TUC. This is where the justifiable "principle" enters. The chauvinist slogan of "Irish unions for Irishmen" was calculated to start an avalanche of members from the TUC, which was overloaded with "English" unions.

However, the break was confined to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (led by an "Irish Gompers" if there ever was one — William O'Brien) and several small craft unions with ambitious officers.

As an organizational manoeuvre, the secession was a dismal failure. The only attempt by an Irish union to use the legal device was defeated by a High Court decision handed down to the National Union of Railwaymen in 1947, decreeing that the relevant section of the act was unconstitutional.

The following year, 1948, set the seal on the decline of the CIU. In that year De Valera's 16 years of uninterrupted rule was ended by his defeat in the general election.

From there on, the life of the CIU has been characterized by several splits-off into the TUC, and a rapprochement by sections of the CIU leadership with the TUC-based Labor Party. With the declining fortunes of De Valera's Fianna Fail (Tory) party, the CIU bureaucracy finds it difficult to peddle its political wares profitably. Hence the move toward unity.

Another consideration in this question of unity is the needs of the Labor ministers in the government coalition. Norton, the senior Labor minister, is charged with "making the economy work," but is hampered by the militant wage-happy mood of the union ranks.

Added to this, the leaders of both congresses are sensitive to the competitive uncertainties of separate existence. A wage movement initiated by the smallest affiliate of either congress is pounced upon by its opposite number in the other congress and a whole pattern of wage demands unfolds. Union officers dare not concede the militant initiative to their opposite number. Union organizers still count heads for a living.

In this climate, Norton hasn't an earthly chance of getting top union agreement on wage restraint.

Norton also hopes that in a united congress the corrupt right-wing CIU elements will hog-tie any potential threat from the very critical elements in the TUC, who at the last Labor Party conference came out sharply against the coalition's economic policy which was being touted by Norton on the conference platform, a policy amounting to recommending laissez-faire to the unions. Straw in the wind: a proportionately higher number of CIU bureaucrats have been placed in the several non-elective adjuncts to the elected administration.

If I credit Norton with this grandiose strategy it is because he is the arch-Machiavelli in the government ranks. The capitalist ministers are universally hated by the working class, and unless Norton can circumvent the growing critical mood of the workers the government's days are numbered.



Emblem of the Irish Transport and General workers union

But Norton is sowing dragon's seed. A united congress of labor will command tremendous prestige and might well upset the balance of forces inside the Labor Party. For purely mercenary and personal reasons, many new aspirants to Norton's position may emerge. In any event a tremendous impetus will be unleashed politically by the industrial unity of the working class.

In this period of organizational flux, solid gains can be made for the erection of a socialist left wing in the Labor Party.

MPs in jail

At Westminster last week, Tory-Unionists Betty and Grosvenor were presented to the House of Commons as the "members of Parliament" for the Mid-Ulster and Tyrone-Fermanagh divisions of North Ireland. The quote-marks are used because these Unionist interlopers were seated by a judicial decision which set aside the democratic majority decision of the nationalist voters in these two areas of North Ireland.

Messrs. Clarke and Mitchell, Irish Republican Army activists who are serving 10 years in Belfast jail for their part in the raid on a British military barracks in North Ireland, were the ones actually returned to Parliament (Mitchell on two occasions), with substantial majorities, as abstentionist MPs.

According to a British law introduced 100 years ago to deal with essentially the same situation, any person serving a sentence for treason-felony is ineligible to sit in Parliament, but, according to the same law, not ineligible to offer himself for election.

Ironical jeers of "Here come the members for the Queen's Bench division" were shouted at the Unionists from the Labor benches. "Queen's Bench" means, of course, the legal fiddle.

Three IRA activists were sentenced to life for their part in the raid on Arborfield Barracks in Berkshire, England. The viciousness of the sentence was aimed at deterring others from pursuing the same line of action.

How stupid is the logic of the British security blimps! Punitive measures like these are the emotional mill-grist of the IRA. Martyrdom for Ireland was always calculated to swell the ranks of the IRA with young fearless militant cadres more determined than ever that direct and violent action was the only arbiter.

Dublin labor restive

The economic crisis has broken and exposed the bankruptcy of the ruling government coalition, Labor and all. In the teeth of the inflationary spiral, the only advice offered the workers by their erstwhile cabinet representatives is: Take it up with your unions.

They have indicated their unwillingness either to control prices, or to cushion the impact of these rises on the workers' standards by subsidies. The declared policy of the government is: The lid is off; let the economic grouping fight it out, and the devil take the hindmost.

The Dublin Trades Union Council representing 40,000 union members has gone on record protesting the cynical sidestepping by the Labor ministers of their oft-declared intention to put teeth into the price-control machinery when canvassing party support for participation in the cabinet. During the Council debate on the protest motion, repeated demands were made by the delegates that the Labor ministers quit the government.

The Labor ministers are becoming so discredited that in order to cling to office, attempts are being made to guy the

Dublin Trade Union Council, which is the only significant working-class body that has consistently exposed the corrupt and opportunist character of the Labor Party leaders' coalition policy, from a socialist standpoint. Norton, Labor's senior minister, who is as venal a labor-faker as ever graced any social-democratic party, is known to be preoccupied by the outspoken critical role of the Council.

6. Labor Action 20 February 1956

Merger of trade-union centres will give Irish labor a lift

Dublin, 22 January 1956. On 5 January the two trade union centres — the Trade Union Congress and the Congress of Irish Unions — held special conferences to discuss and decide on the unity document drawn up by their respective teams of negotiations. The negotiators had met some two dozen times within two years, under the chairmanship of Prof. Busted (University College, Cork).

The special conferences voted for the unity proposals contained in the document, by substantial majorities.

In the case of the CIU, it is reported that the decision was unanimous. This is a far cry from the CIU's anti-unity intransigence of even four years ago.

The anti-unity forces at the TUC meeting rolled up one-third of the votes cast. This was surprising, since the initiative on unity had been taken by the TUC.

The anti-unity vote at the TUC meeting was drawn from the Woodworkers, the Engineers, and the bureaucratized Irish offshoot of the Transport & General Workers Union, together with a sprinkling of native time-servers whose independent and factional activities would be eclipsed in a united movement. The three unions mentioned above are what are colloquially known as "English unions" by virtue of the fact that, their headquarters are in Britain, and they represent at worst the Unionist mentality on the trade union level. ("Unionist" means favouring political union with Britain.)

Actions such as these lay bare the basic political division on the national question and the constitutional character of the two states in Ireland: one existing by integration proper in the United Kingdom, and the other born of the independent struggle and its political attitudes subjectively conditioned by that struggle, though economically and objectively dependent on Britain's patronage.

The unity document itself provides for the setting up of a provisional united organization of a federal character with a 16-man steering committee drawn from each centre charged with the task of providing a constitution and the consummation of the merger by 1962. The congresses in a formal sense will continue their separate existences, but the emphasis will be on joint activity at every level and at every juncture.

Quite probably the first major task will be on future wage policy and movements, costs and prices. Just now the credit squeeze attendant on the one per cent increase in the bank rate must immediately affect costs and prices. Unemployment is mounting and the official index stands at 60,000 at the moment. This must be further amplified as manufacturers cut back stockpiling and plant expansion on bank overdrafts, in the face of the jacked-up bank rates. Building, municipal and speculative, for working-class and middle-class housing will take a nosedive by putting rents and mortgage repayments out of income reach.

The background of the economic facts of life in Ireland today conditions the latest activity of Minister Norton, the Labor Party's leader. Norton's attempt to sell Ireland to U.S. capitalism on his American junket is either an extended hay ride or the prelude to a deal on NATO. It is not mere coincidence that Premier Costello is to lecture on Constitutional law at Yale later this year.

It should be remembered that a major policy decision on Ireland's external relations was announced at an international gathering of lawyers in Canada in 1949 by the same Mr. Costello who was the premier in the first coalition government. It is well known that Norton is the government's "fixer." Sincere apologies to bona-fide stage-managers.

Getting back to the TUC conference, it was remarkable if only for the bizarre antics of the Stalinists. Betty Sinclair, a leading Stalinist militant representing the Belfast Trades

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Council, lashed the anti-unity leaders of the Woodworkers and the Transport Workers for their capitulation to the sectarian and opportunist Tory politics of Unionism (political union with Britain). Holmes, a former faithful Stalinist hack in the Transport Workers' Belfast sector, moved the reference back of the unity document. In the voting line-up, Sinclair and the uninhibited Stalinists in the Electrical Trade Union voted solidly for unity, while the Stalinists in the various levels of the bureaucracy of the Woodworkers, Transport Workers and Engineers jumped into line when their union top brass sounded the rally.

A feeling of optimism has pervaded the ranks of the movement again on the morrow of the unity moves. The industrial weaknesses attendant on the existence of a formal organisational break, particularly in industries where there is a multiplicity of unions, are within reach of correction.

Long overdue steps to rationalize and assess jurisdiction on the basis of industries and functions can now be taken. The educational work of the movement can be given an enormous push forward and the most important element is the reintegration of the Labor Party as a potentially powerful vehicle of the political aspirations of the Irish working class.

7. Labor Action 5 March 1956

Irish Labor left is pushing for break with government coalition

Dublin, 23 February. The political situation here is pregnant with possibilities for the Labor left. Hard on the heels of the setting up of the provisional united trade-union centre, Larkin and Conroy, leaders of the country's two largest general unions, have come out sharply against the know-nothing policies of the government coalition (which includes the Irish Labor Party) in the face of the economic crisis.

Conroy and Larkin, both obviously under pressure from their members, have demanded increased public control of banking and credit and, in turn, at union gatherings and Labor forty membership meetings, flayed the government for the shift to economic chaos, inherent in the moth-eaten capitalist device of deflation.

Growing unemployment and soaring prices at the same time underscore the absolute dependence of the Irish economy. Full employment in Britain and West Europe inflates the cost of materials and services with devastating effect on the Irish price structure. The Tory credit squeeze in Britain is calculated to depress consumption and investment in an effort to sustain the balance of foreign payments and to boost exports at competitive prices, in the cut-throat climate of the world market.

The automatic application, by the Irish government (including its Labor ministers) of the British Tory chancellor's deflationary measures to a situation (underinvestment and chronic underemployment) that is basically different from Britain is deepening the crisis of Irish capitalist society.

Even that diffident apologist for capitalism, De Valera, was prompted to remark, in a by-election speech at Kerry last week, that the incompetence of this capitalist coalition administration was imperilling the existence and social solidarity of bourgeois interests, by their resolute attitude of the government to the needs of the economy.

He said that two currents of political thought found solace in the growing crisis: the "back-to-Britain"-school who denigrated the independence movement, and the revolutionary socialists, who would exploit the economic breakdown. He hardly had in mind the Labor Party or the Stalinists in his reference to revolutionary socialism.

Against this background a minor revolt is scheduled for the Labor Party conference in April, a revolt against continuing Labor support to the coalition. Several motions submitted demand an action program that the party would use to highlight a break with the capitalist parties in the government: measures like nationalization of the banks, of the flour-mills, soak-the-rich taxes, import-export control, and state purchasing abroad to cut out the agents who chisel up the cost.

Labor Minister Norton can be expected to blow his top, because he is the minister responsible for the economic well-being of the country, as well as being the senior Labor



Jim Larkin

minister in the cabinet.

It is believed that union leaders will play a major role in this debate, because of the militant mood and pressure of the ranks against the attempt to lay off the crisis on them. A new critical mood is apparent in those sections of the party that in the past faithfully reflected Norton's craven collaboration with the most reactionary capitalist elements in the government.

One Sunday newspaper columnist, who is usually on the inside of Labor, developments, hints at the possibility that Norton may be a McDonald act and break organizationally with the party. His ideological break has not been in doubt for years.

Lemass, who is De Valera's economic expert and Norton's predecessor in the Ministry of Industry, discarded Norton's current economic theories 20 years ago. Such is the measure of Norton's thinking — even in a capitalist sense.

Larkin is being touted as the leader of the Labor left in certain Labor Party circles. However, Larkin's behaviour is enigmatic. He has done some dirty chores in recent times for the right-wing leaders, while continuing to mouth left-wing phrases, together with an occasional genuflection to the Stalinist elements in the party.

It is agreed that he speaks from strength now, because of his influential position in the united trade-union centre, and that he is becoming more outspoken and critical of the crassly ignorant and opportunist line of the Labor ministers.

Local Stalinists here, with the agility of mental Houdinis, are lapping up the popular-front line emanating from the 20th Communist Party circus in Moscow and are endeavouring — wryly, of course — to justify Mikoyan's debunking of Stalin after collaborating with it all for a lifetime. Now that the divinity of the Father of All the Russians has been exploded and the Great Father himself is no more; we have denunciation all around.

8. Labor Action 9 April 1956

Coalition vote falls in Irish by-election

Dublin, 16 March. Hang together or hang separately: that is the axiom of the government coalition. In the North Kerry by-election, it was De Valera against the rest, namely, against the government coalition of the conservative Fine Gael, Labor Party, Farmers, and Republicans, all ganged up to present a façade of unity to the voters.

The government candidate was a nominee of the Republicans, the daughter of the late deputy whose place was being filled, following his death in a road accident. She had been press-ganged into the election by the ward-heeling requirements of Irish politics. A girl of 21, her only political attributes were her father's name and his tragic death.

However, the combined government vote behind her went down by 2000, while De Valera's rose by 900, indicating a perceptible shift from the government parties.

Factors were the economic crisis, and the palpably demagogic line of De Valera's party, which was possible because there was no working class party independently in the running pledged to a program of radical economic and social change. The Labor Party is part of the coalition, unfortunately.

Confusion worse confounded characterizes the Stalinist parrots here on the line of the 20th Congress. Stalin, stripped of his diabolical divinity by his former lieutenants, has left the party followers floundering in an ideological morass. Years of automatic responses and monolithic concepts will stand them in good stead however.

9. Labor Action 6 August 1956

Irish Labour left loses out

Dublin, July 1. The 1956 conference of the Irish Labor Party has come and gone. The revolt of the ranks against the continued tie-up of the ministers in the capitalist coalition which was anticipated by this correspondent fizzled out. The only socialist criticism of the coalition came from two isolated sections of the party, N. Wicklow and Dublin S. W.

The N. Wicklow comrades withdrew the motion "to leave the government" at the last moment but only in order to avoid an outright and overwhelming endorsement of the collaborationist line of the leaders; but first there was a long debate that underscored the torpor of the ranks on the crucial question for the party's future.

Nonetheless, the anti-coalition utterances of non-affiliated union leaders and isolated criticisms by local party leaders have had their effect on the Labor coalition cabal led by Norton. In his reply to the "break the coalition" debate, he was the soul of democratic humility.

Whereas in the past he has thundered against the subversive socialist minority and heaped personal abuse on the heads of the few socialists who dared expose his policy of capitulation to the forces of capitalist political reaction, on this occasion he offered his "title deeds of office" (as he termed it) to the party's parliamentary group or to the party conference at any time, if either one or the other body indicated this course. He knew in advance of course that his personal influence and his ability to dole out largesse to the faithful made such a demand unreal at this juncture.

Just prior to the conference, about a half-dozen party members from the Dublin organization were hauled before an inquisitorial commission of the party and were accused of activities "harmful to the party". It was generally assumed that pre-conference discussions among socialist members was being used to suspend their membership and preclude their attendance at the conference. It is reported, however, that several members of the commission had very red faces when the session ended. As usual the dirty hatchet work was shared by a brace of former Communist Party members.

Trotskyists debate Ireland



Burntollet march in 1968

Body-blow to CP

Speaking of the post-Stalin Stalinists: Feverish moves are being made to erect a front organization with an organ like the *New Statesman and Nation*. Hard on the heels of the Khrushchev line-switch, overtures were being made even to intransigent anti-CP elements for support to the venture.

The CP, which never really amounted to much here at any juncture, has suffered a tremendous body-blow to its coterie of members and sympathizers by the debunking of Stalin. For them, with their minds conditioned by Catholic authoritarian doctrine, the passage to Stalin worship was quite effortless. The subsequent expose by Khrushchev, of Stalin's undivine character in certain selected fields, has brought the whole doctrinal edifice into question.

The Catholic Church in Ireland is bound to benefit at the expense of the Irish Workers' League (the CP). The Catholic Church, ever awake in its propaganda activities, has recently featured at its Sociological Congress none other than Douglas Hyde, ex-editor of the English *Daily Worker*, no doubt with the intention of recruiting the totalitarian faithful back to Rome.

Unemployment will become a real problem in this country as full employment in Britain becomes less full and as the impact of automation is really felt on the British economy. Unless emigration to the U. S. and the Dominions supersedes emigration to Britain (12,000 to 15,000 per year), a social crisis will be on the order of the day. The danger is that in the absence of a genuine revolutionary socialist party, a nationalist fascist mass movement led by Sinn Fein will bid for power on the slogan of ending the partition of the country as a means of ending the economic crisis.

10. Labor Action 15 October 1956

The Irish Labor Party: a sketch

To describe the Irish Labor Party within its present limits as analogous to the British Labor Party would be inaccurate indeed.

Ideologically and organizationally they differ as do the economies from which they derive sustenance. The Irish Labor Party with its rural bias is in a much weaker position organizationally than is the urban-based BLP.

In the British Party there is a constant stimulus from trade-union consciousness flowing over into social-democratic political forms; this gives the BLP its stable proletarian character. This element is absent from Irish Labor politics today. What trade-union militancy did emerge in the early days of the petty industrialization of the larger towns was si-

phoned off into the all-class crucible of the independence movement.

In the early days of the Second World War when a radical ferment was induced by attempts to cripple the unions by legislation, the Irish Labor Party made some remarkable headway throughout the country. Tragically, however, a bitter personal feud at the top of the Trade Union Congress was manipulated by the Tory-nationalist party of De Valera; and the TUC and the Labor Party split down the middle. What was termed the national wing — which had initiated the break — rehabilitated the decadent Fianna Fail party of De Valera for a further period.

Ideologically the Labor Party, from its birth at the Trade Union Congress of 1912 till the middle '30s, bore the imprint of James Connolly's socialist philosophy.

After Connolly was executed for leading the first workers' army against the British imperial power in Ireland in 1916, the tempo of the direct-actionist struggle for national independence tended to blunt the edge of the class struggle. Bourgeois revolutionaries and patriotic mercenaries dwarfed the post-Connolly mediocrities of Irish Labor.

The new Irish state born in 1922 found the revolutionary middle class in political control. Their quid pro quo for their revolutionary activity was economic hegemony. They evolved away from the social implications of the Proclamation of 1916 — inspired by Connolly — and became the integrated ruling capitalist class that we know today.

Side by side with the growing conservatism of the petty bourgeoisie, the nondescript Labor leaders became equally conservative in their social and political attitudes. Bit by bit, the revolutionary socialist theses of Connolly were expunged from the Labor and trade-union movement. The socialistic demagoguery of De Valera underscored the bankruptcy of the Labor leaders. The country settled down to the sodden rule of the middle class for 20 years.

During this time the Catholic hierarchy emerged as a major political factor in the recession of the Irish Labor Party as an independent socialist party. It was the Irish National Teachers Organization (no doubt acting on the instruction of, the hierarchy) that, at the 1938 Labor Party conference, sponsored the motion to remove the constitutional aspiration that the "aim of the party is the establishment of a workers' republic."

The adoption of that motion formalized a political reaction that had long since been a fact.

Today the Irish Labor Party is a caricature of a social-democratic party. Though partly based on the trade unions, it is nevertheless, in the matter of political and economic theory, far to the right of the Trade Union Congress, though the TUC has a working agreement with it;

How long this modus vivendi will continue is hard to say. The unity of the trade-union movement is proceeding apace and the balance of forces may well alter politically inside the Labor Party when full unity is consummated.

For Irish socialists this development offers a fruitful field of work. Greater trade-union influence in the party will be a means of correcting the non-class mentality that has condemned the Irish Labor Party to the role of providing a lucrative living for a select bunch of unscrupulous politicians exploiting the devoted allegiance of workers who were nurtured in the Connolly tradition of independent labor politics.

11. Labor Action 5 November 1956

Discontent bubbling in Dublin

Dublin, Oct. 7. The Provisional United Organization of the two trade-union congresses (in the process of merging) has in recent weeks been reluctantly forced into the open to call a halt to the deflationary policies of the Labor-supported coalition government. These policies have been creating widespread unemployment. The united leadership's hand was forced by an irate membership given a lead by the 80,000-strong Dublin Trades Union Council.

Playing possum for two and a half years, the upper crust of the two congresses have for their silence been on the receiving end of the political-patronage queue, while their members were being flung out of employment and forced to emigrate in tens of thousands to Britain. The most odious and vicious anti-working-class measures of the Labor ministers in the coalition could not induce the boys in clover to utter a peep. Silence is golden.

Now the wrath of members and local leaders who see the looming economic storm that will shatter their domestic fortunes has exploded in the august precincts of PUO headquarters. Binks, last year's PUO president, politely admonished the two governments in the country (Dublin and Belfast, to show no favoritism) on their lack of sensitivity for workers' needs. One can expect a lack of sensitivity from the archaic Tory Unionist regime in Belfast; but when among the Dublin ministers are ex-TUC presidents, whose governmental policies are less humane than the double-dyed Tories in Belfast, why the attempt to whitewash them?

Binks referred to the crisis at all because the Dublin TUC had issued a call for demonstrations and protest meetings to head off further measures being contemplated to dismiss workers from public and government services. The Council further demanded that the national trade-union centres, in line with long-standing policy decisions, move against the government and put the squeeze on the Labor ministers, or break with them completely.

Larkin, a member of the PUO and a Labor deputy to boot, sensing the mood of the ranks, came out at a Regional Labor Party Conference with a sharp attack on the government, in-

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cluding its Labor contingent, to head off the harmless speculation of the rank-and-file movement for militant action. This is Larkin's Stalinist training being applied against the left. He has been a consistent and demagogic supporter of the coalition and it was he who laid down the blueprint for Labor's participation in the present government at the 1953 Labor Party conference paving the way for the right-wing leadership (Norton and Co.) to lash the small socialist opposition.

In preserving this government set-up, he has used his trade-union position to head off and damp down any militant anti-government movement. Now threatened with the loss of his parliamentary sinecure, he publicly criticizes what he privately upholds and created and what he voted to continue at the jamboree which the cabinet convened to bolster their trembling fortunes in the face of trade-unionist revolt.

To help sustain the rank-and-file revolt, the Dublin Trades Council is sponsoring a mass protest meeting on the eve of the autumn reassembly of Parliament. On the other hand the TUC has convened — so the story goes — two special conferences for both parts of the country to discuss the situation — this only in the face of clamour from its unemployed and emigrating members, and perhaps too late to avoid complete breakdown in living standards.

It is indeed time for the Irish trade-union movement to reorient its political thinking and put socialism on the agenda. When Irish workers cease to be pariahs in their own land, they will also cease to be a threat to the living standards of the English brethren who have placed the struggle for socialism as a top priority on their political list.

12. Labor Action 29 April 1957

Irish vote punishes Laborites

Dublin, 6 April. The coalition government in Ireland is down; the general election is over; and as I write, the votes are being counted.

McBride, one-time leader of the direct-actionist Irish Republican Army, and a constitutionalist since 1947 when he launched his Republican Party, withdrew the support of his three deputies from the government. The course he adopted was urged upon the Irish Labor Party repeatedly in the last 18 months; but the coup de grace was administered by the clever, manoeuvring, opportunist and demagogic lawyer.

Observers are puzzled by McBride's action. While undoubtedly the tide was running high against the government in recent months, McBride as late as last October supported a motion of confidence in the coalition at an all-party jamboree held to boost the morale of the government's parliamentary ranks.

It is true that on economic issues he has been mildly critical of the lack of government policies to beat the crisis of mass unemployment. On the issue of the physical-force IRA and the government's measures to deal with the problem, he has at no time, however, indicated clearly where he stood on the current campaign of engaging in violence across the border.

It is known that the rump of his party, which is largely composed of ex-IRA activists, was chafing at the authorities' use of the Offences Against the State Act to disperse the IRA, and had thrown down the gauntlet to him to get out and break the government. This he did by presenting a no-confidence motion to be taken at the spring session of the parliament.

Fianna Fail (De Valera's party) was not to be outmaneuvered, however. Rather than troop into the lobby behind McBride (whom they detest with an all-pervading fervour) on his terms, they indicated their intention to present a no-confidence motion themselves. Sensing the ignominy of a prolonged and discreditable debate, the government dissolved parliament to cut their political losses. But too late. De Valera has skated home with something to spare.

The workers, appalled by the utter disregard for principles and ethics by the Labor ministers in the coalition government, have given the Labor Party its answer. The small pre-election force of 19 deputies has been reduced to 12.

Some commentators suggest that this was better than expected. Those who were returned were outstanding personalities, whose membership in the Labor Party has always been only incidental to their ward-healing activities.

Larkin, sensing the mood of the people and a possible defeat at their hands in South Dublin, refused to contest his seat,

which he has held uninterruptedly for 14 years. But he can accept a large measure of the blame for the debacle, having consistently defended and advocated the coalition line inside the Labor Party, from his spurious left position, which derives from his Stalinist associations of long ago.

An indication of the decadence of the Irish Labor Party is the fact that the son of James Connolly, Roddy, contested Larkin's seat for the party and polled a paltry 1700 votes, coming second-last in a field of 10 candidates. The militant Unemployed Protest Committee had their nominee, John Murphy, an unemployed carpenter, elected in this constituency.

Murphy's victory spotlights the mass proportions that the unemployment figures had assumed under the coalition in its last months of office.

The highlight of the election was the return of Dr. Noel Browne in Dublin Southeast.

Dr. Browne, a democratic socialist, has had a turbulent existence since entering political life some 10 years ago. At that time he was returned in the 1948 general election as a Republican deputy. His party shared office in the coalition with Labor and the Conservative Fine Gael, Browne becoming minister for Health.

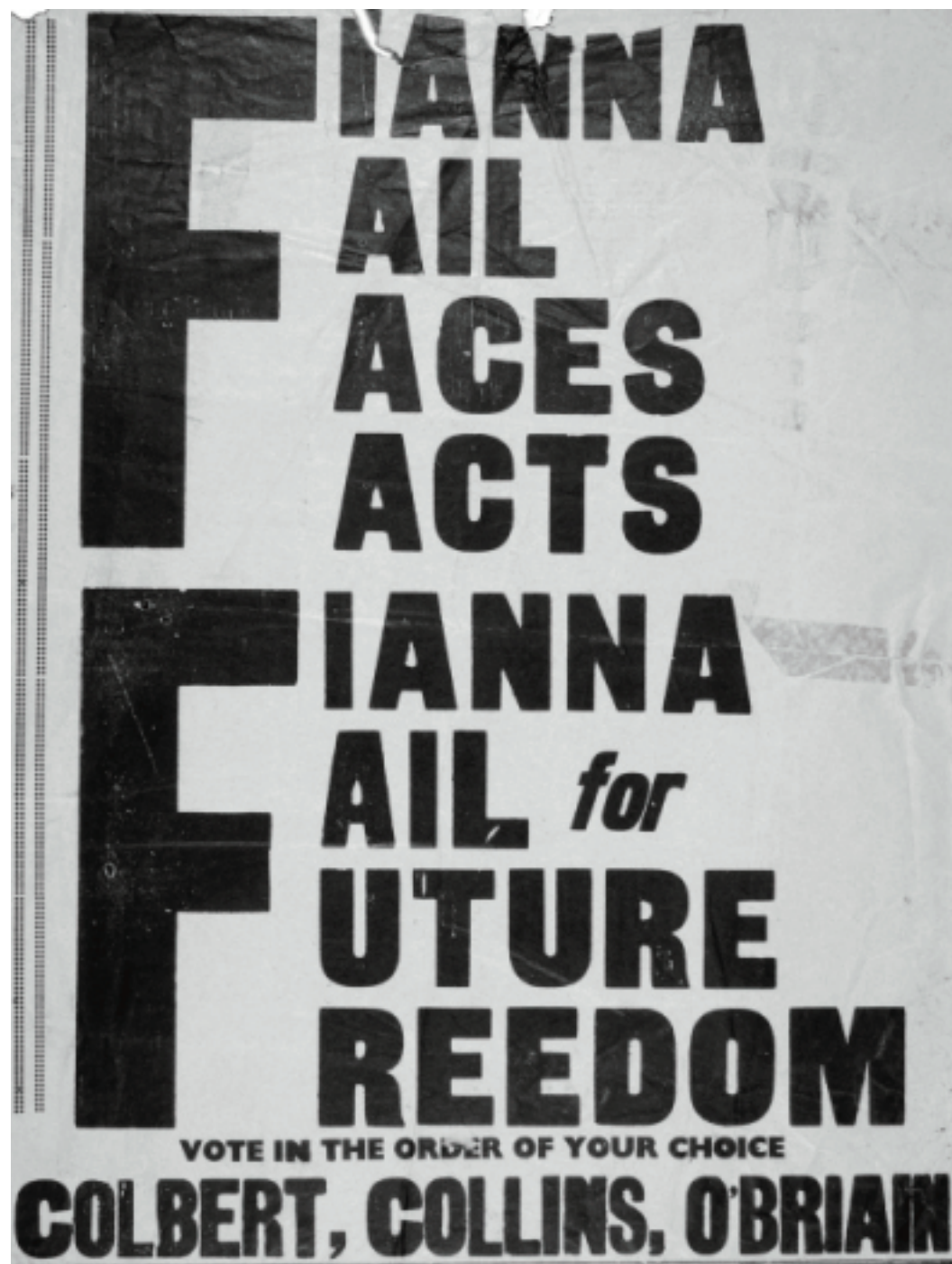
True to his promise, he proceeded to put medicine and the health services on a socialist basis. In 1951, just three years after taking office, the culmination of his efforts was a free Mother and Child Health Service. The powerful Irish Medical Association and the Catholic hierarchy united on a cash and moral basis to defeat the measure.

McBride, the Machiavellian lawyer overshadowed in the party by the brilliant, industrious and honest Browne, drove him from the party and thereby brought the coalition crashing to the ground.

Browne and several of his colleagues who had fought for a secular and socialist accent on politics in Ireland, betrayed by their natural allies, the clerical-indulgent Labor Party, had remarkable successes at the subsequent general election: but they compromised their whole position by actively supporting and subsequently outrightly joining De Valera's party. Browne's socialist and secular views found little response in De Valera's party, which had long since jettisoned its left wing.

The party machine refused to accept Browne as a candidate, and, under pressure from liberals, socialists, left Laborites, and honest citizens, he consented to stand in his old constituency of Dublin Southeast as an independent social-democrat. His victory was remarkable; he polled nearly as many votes as the outgoing prime minister, Costello.

It is interesting to note that perhaps the most militant and active socialist members of the Labor Party's Dublin organization flocked to support and vote for Browne, the only acknowledged and uncompromising socialist in the whole campaign, including the Labor Party candidates.



Fianna Fail poster from 1957 election

Not even the son of Connolly, who was perhaps the greatest socialist Ireland has produced, felt impelled to refer to this great movement which is the hope of humanity everywhere. Browne — the middle-class idealist, the man of integrity, isolated-and surrounded by a handful of adherents — has raised the banner of socialist working-class politics from the mire of the Labor Party sewer.

The victory of Murphy, candidate of the Unemployed Protest Committee, is both a tribute to the class-consciousness of the workers of South Dublin and the Trojan efforts of a tiny group of Stalinist militants who promoted Murphy together with a leading Jesuit (each struggling to cancel out the influence of the other). Truly a remarkable set-up!

These sidelights on the election serve to pick out the positive class features. The overwhelming victory of De Valera (an effective majority of 15-20 votes) was not a pro-De Valera expression but an uncontrolled revulsion against the indifference and bankruptcy of the coalition parties.

Even the sectarian and negative Sinn Fein (the political organization of the physical-forcists) which is pledged to abstention from parliament, had a remarkable success, with four deputies elected and polling 50,000 first-preference votes. It appeared as a "new hope" to the cynical and apathetic mass.

What progress would an independent socialist-led Labor Party have made in the context! The decadence of the capitalist parties would have been thoroughly exposed to socialist analysis; and the political conclusions drawn by the working class would have placed a majority Labor government on the political agenda within the next five years.

The first discussion in Socialist Review, 1957

"It would seem that you have altered your programme because some pseudo-socialists in Ireland are 'unclear' on the issue. This seems to me to be a perilously near approach to the attitude of the legendary Yankee politician who assured his hearers that 'Them's my sentiments, and if you don't like them they can be scrapped.'" – P Lavin, *Socialist Review*, 1 March 1959

Socialist Review was the journal of the Socialist Review group, the forerunner of the International Socialists in the 1960s and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) since 1977.

In the first six years of its existence, from 1950, *Socialist Review* had never said a word about Ireland. This is curious, because Tony Cliff, the founder and leader of the Socialist Review group, had lived in Dublin as a student from 1947 to 1951. For anyone needing to learn the nature of Irish politics, the politics of Partition included, and of the 26 county Catholic-sectarian state, it would be difficult to find a period in Irish history offering such an intense and concentrated series of educational events as those afforded to the student Ygael Gluckstein [Cliff] in those years.

The Catholic bishops had brutally deployed their great power to veto an attempt to introduce rudimentary free health-care for mothers and children by the Minister for Health, Dr. Noel Browne.

The 26 county Free State proclaimed itself a Republic in January 1949. Apart from leaving the Commonwealth and thus adding an additional obstacle to relations with northern Ireland, nothing changed. The Southern parties had waged a big international propaganda campaign against Partition, and thereby encouraging a revival of the physical force Republican movement, whose members attempted with guns to achieve what the 26 Counties political Establishment tried and failed to achieve with diplomacy and propaganda.

Socialist Review was small and it appeared infrequently, bi-monthly at best in its early period. That may in part explain the total silence on Ireland. In 1957 the *Socialist Review* (SR) group announced that it had fused with a few, Nottingham-based, recent Communist Party members. (Eventually they would be the original nucleus of the Mandel-Pablo Fourth International in Britain in the 1960s).

As a result of the fusion discussions, *Socialist Review* changed the statement of its principles that appeared in every issue. One existing position was modified, and a new one was added.

Thus in the April 1957 issue, for the first time, *Socialist Review* took a stand on the "Irish question".

SR, it announced, was for "The reunification of an independent Ireland". This was an odd formulation.

To Republicans and nationalists, a united Ireland fully separated from Britain was what they understood by independence. *Socialist Review's* formulation begged a lot more questions than it answered. What did it mean?

That the Six Counties should become independent and then unite with the 26 Counties? Meanwhile? For practical purposes socialists should recognise the existing partition? And what did it mean for the labour movement? For Irish socialists?

That the socialists and the workers' movement should continue to be separate, North and South? Their militants would work separately for an independent Northern Ireland, explaining that independence was necessary so that the two independent states could achieve the great goal of all-Ireland unity? That they were against Irish unity, or calls for unity, until the Six Counties had won their independence from Britain? And the revolutionary workers meanwhile? They should organise separately and conduct their struggles separately?

On the face of it, *Socialist Review's* new position was a pro-Partition variant of the call for a united Ireland. None of that was spelt out, and possibly was not fully understood by the ultra-subtle people who had formulated the new position.

It was typical of the group to first change the "line" and then "discuss" it; when they dropped this innovation, it would be the same procedure.

It would emerge in the discussion that followed in 1957-8, and in the 1969 discussion, that SR's position was that there



should be *two* Irish socialist revolutions, and *then* unity. The Stalinists were notorious among Trotskyists for advocating a two-stage Irish revolution — first "full" independence and reunification, then socialism. SR would stand this idea on its head: first two separate socialist revolutions, then unification.

PATRICIA RUSHTON

Socialist Review contracts out the job of explaining the "Irish question" to Patricia Rushton, secretary of the "Movement For Colonial Freedom".

This organisation was led by the Labour MP Fenner Brockway — who had been a leader of the ILP until the mid-forties — and similar well-meaning people.

Patricia Rushton will for a while write for *Socialist Review* on other "colonial" questions, such as Central Africa. Her "Irish Politics Today" (May 1957) says nothing about the new *Socialist Review* formula.

Rushton's language suggests a CP or CP-influenced background; her outlook is that of an Irish populist nationalist; her account of things is what the Connolly Association, the CP Irish "front" in Britain, is saying in pamphlets and in its monthly paper *Irish Democrat*. These ideas have a widespread influence in the British labour movement, and in the labour Party too. They will be permuted in the subsequent discussion.

There are "two real issues in Irish politics today", she tells SR readers, Partition and unemployment, and the emigration which is the result of unemployment. She puts the exodus at 40,000 a year from the not-quite three million population of the 26 counties.

Unemployment, she tells SR readers, is the result of Partition. "Having failed to solve [Partition, the Irish Government] have therefore failed to make any impression on unemployment and immigration"

Supposedly designed to "protect the [protestant-Unionist] minority" on the island, in fact Partition has "viciously attacked the welfare of the [all-Ireland] majority".

Partition has created evils such as Catholic Church domination in the South, evils that are in turn used to justify Partition.

Without the exclusion of the "potentially radical" working class of the North, the Catholic Church would not be so dominant in the South.

She quotes James Connolly in 1914 that Partition would disrupt and destroy the labour movement and "help the Home Rule [nationalist] and Orange (Unionist) capitalists and clerics to keep their political rallying cries before the public... [and] would make division more intense and confusion of ideas and positions more confounded"

This, Connolly's assessment of the likely consequences of Partition, is common stock on the anti-Partitionist left. Connolly had written that partition would bring "a carnival of reaction", North and South. (But his conclusion from that prospect was not the common stock of the Left. It was that, therefore, rather than Partition it would be better that no part of Ireland should have Home Rule).

Rushton sees Partition not as a consequence of the chronic antagonism between Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-nationalist Ireland, but as the cause and origin of this division.

"With the workers divided, reactionary governments have ruled in Ireland on both sides of the Border."

The result is mass unemployment and emigration.

Under a cross-head, "Death of a Labour Party", Rushton explains that Irish Labour "lost its constructive socialist thinker" when the British firing squad killed James Connolly in May 1916, 41 years earlier.

Two politically similar bourgeois parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, dominate 26 County politics.

The non-socialist Labour Party, participant in two coalition governments, has become a satellite of the weakest of them, Fine Gael, with no distinctive politics of its own.

The unemployed in Dublin have stood Jack Murphy in Dublin South Central, and won a Dail seat. Noel Browne, a noted critic of the Catholic Church in Irish politics, with the backing of many Labour Party members, has stood in Dublin as an independent, and won.

She thinks that the power of the Catholic church is greatly exaggerated. People would vote left if the Labour Party gave them the chance to. "If the Labour Party had a genuinely socialist policy, and had run a militant campaign, they would not have suffered the losses they did in the recent elections".

That is the significance of the 65,000 and four seats won by Sinn Fein (Abstentionists on principle, Sinn Fein refuse to take the seats they won.) "Not so much an indication that the people back a policy of armed force against Ulster, but that they realise the importance of Partition in Irish life and are

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willing to support those who keep the question alive”.

The main lesson of the recent election is, she thinks, “That people want a progressive policy and will vote for it when they find it”. “The duty of the “labour movement” is to put forward a radical policy and “on it build a socialist party in the South of Ireland” (Emphasis added). Until that is done, no progress can be made towards solving the problem of partition [or] “the running sore of Irish life”, unemployment and emigration.

“The rank and file of the Labour Party must replace the present leadership with men of more militant character and greater integrity”.

If Labour offers to the people a radical policy it can hope to build a strong opposition and eventually a Labour Government. It would “gather to itself the more socially and economically aware members of the present Sinn Fein and all those progressive independents who have come to the fore because of the failures of the Irish Labour Party to fulfil its historic duty...”

THE MYTHICAL “CASE AGAINST PARTITION”

This article accurately sums up the dominant attitudes on the populist-nationalist Left and the CP-influenced segments of the Labour Movement. Much of it is nonsensical. The “nonsense” will generate in SR a fruitful discussion on Ireland.

That there has been a “carnival of reaction”, north and south, for more than three decades, is understatement rather than exaggeration. That the Partition border and intra-Irish economic tariffs make the economic situation worse than it might otherwise be is also true. (The tariffs were first erected by the Dublin government in the early thirties).

Rushton offers no explanation for Partition. Partition operates as a malevolent but mysterious force. In fact, though existing divisions allowed Britain great scope for manipulation, Partition was a consequence not a cause of division.

The assumption that Ireland was a “natural” economic entity disrupted by partition is pointedly not true: Ireland has never provided the market for the big industries in the North, which included what was then the largest shipyards in the world. Neither Dublin nor Belfast were the centre of an interknit Irish economic entity. Both segments of Ireland related to economic centres in Britain.

Mass emigration had been a giant feature of Irish life not since 1922, but since the famine of the 1840s; and indeed there had been large-scale emigration long before that (And other large-scale famines). Not only is partition not explained, not only is it used as a first cause for things of which it was a product not a cause, but the end of Partition is seen as a cure-all, without any notion of how it is to be achieved or how its economic magic will work.

Patricia Rushton offered a seriously stupid piece of explaining away to account for the upsurge of nationalism in response to the border campaign. Four Sinn Fein TDs were elected because people wanted to keep the issue of partition to the forefront – as if the Establishment did not “keep the issue alive”.

The main lesson of the recent election is, she thinks, “That people want a progressive policy and will vote for it when they find it”.

Sinn Fein had typically small-bourgeois politics and the ideal of a self-sufficient small-island peasant economy. The statement that they had a progressive policy is so sharply at odds with the reality that the reader is reduced to speculation: what can she have meant? Their opposition to Partition? That was common to all the southern parties. Their militarism? If not that, what?

Now, there is at least a serious possibility that Catholic control, which stifled the 26 counties, would never have been as all-controlling as it in fact was, if one million Protestants had existed in the same state. But the Catholic church already had enormous power in Catholic Ireland. Protestant reaction to the power of the church in Catholic Ireland – expressed in the cry, “Home Rule means Rome Rule” – had been a major factor in mobilising mass opposition to Home Rule. (The fact that in the decade before World War One a very powerful Catholic version of the Orange Order rampaged through Ireland is ignored or forgotten).

The fact that the majority in “Ulster” sees itself as British, as having a national identity different from that of the Catholic-nationalist majority on the island, is ignored; and thus the solution is looked for to working class unity, which is equated with northern working class conversion to sup-

port for a united Ireland — that is, all-Irish working class unity is assumed to automatically produce acceptance by the Northern Ireland working class of the “national” programme of the Catholic-nationalist workers. But it is only possible to make these assumptions by misrepresenting and misidentifying the dynamic causes of Partition and the depth of the communal-national conflict of identities.

The tiny Irish Trotskyist group, which included Matt Merrigan and after 1947 adhered to the “Shachtmanite” Workers’ Party strand in post-Trotsky Trotskyism, has, in the period of Cliff’s residence in Dublin, broken some new ground. It has separated itself from middle-class nationalism and its populist “left” variant by advocating a federal Ireland, which would take account of the distinct identity of the northern Protestants. But no trace of that idea remains in Socialist Review.

SOCIALIST REVIEW FINDS AN INTERPRETER-SPOKESMAN

Patricia Rushton has summed up the populist-left-nationalist version of middle class Catholic nationalism, and repeated the then common understanding of the issues. This has nothing to do with the “subtleties” of the new Socialist Review formula.

But SR now publishes a number of articles that will bring out some of the real complex of issues which constitutes the mid-20th century “Irish question”.

Rushton has not explored the meaning and implications of Socialist Review’s new-minted slogan. In the September 1957 SR it is the turn of Senator Owen Sheehy Skeffington: “What has happened to the Irish revolution?”

Owen Sheehy Skeffington is a humane, pacifistic socialist, a representative of Trinity College Dublin in the Irish Senate. He has campaigned against such things as the comprehensively vicious corporal punishment and other ill-treatments routinely meted out to Irish school children, at a time when nobody else was doing it. Tony Cliff says in his reminiscences that when he lived in Dublin Owen Sheehy Skeffington’s family “adopted” the stranger, inviting him regularly to Sunday dinner.

Owen Sheehy Skeffington is the son of famous parents, Francis Skeffington and Hannah Sheehy. They were feminists — when they married each took the other’s name — pacifists and socialists, associates of Jim Larkin and James Connolly in the battles of Irish labour before 1914.

In campaigning for votes for women, the militant suffrage movement which they led had avoided the rupture with the Labour movement which made the militant suffrage movement in Britain, aristocratic both in outlook and in some of its composition (with the exception of its East London segment, led by Sylvia Pankhurst) bitterly antagonistic to the labour movement. The political root of that antagonism lay in the perceived contradiction between the demand of the labour movement for universal suffrage, and the demand of the suffragettes for the vote “on the same basis as men”, which in practice meant votes on a property qualification that would still have excluded most women, as it already excluded many working class men. It was, therefore, in practice the demand of “votes for ladies.”

In Ireland the Labour movement, led by the militant Larkin and Connolly, supported both the demand for votes on the same basis as men and universal suffrage. The women’s suffrage movement organised by Sheehy and Skeffington, backed the labour movement.

Francis Sheehy Skeffington was a vocal opponent of the nationalist militarism that came to dominate Irish politics in the 1916 Rising, and after. An opponent of the Rising, he went out to try and stop looting during the rising, was captured and summarily shot on the orders of a British officer, who was found to be insane by a subsequent British enquiry into the incident. In the 20s and 30s, Hannah Sheehy Skeffington became closely associated with the Irish Stalinists; in the 1930s her son, Owen, spoke on their platforms.

In July 1957, two months before Socialist Review printed his article, Senator Owen Sheehy-Skeffington has voted in favour of internment of Republicans who refuse to give an undertaking to the state to desist from their military activities. (An internee can at any point secure release by way of a declaration to abide by the law of the 26 Counties.)

Skeffington’s SR piece shows him to be a utopian, as distinct from a Marxist, class-struggle, socialist.

His piece is not identified as a reprint, though it is addressed to an Irish rather than to a British audience. He does not refer at all to Patricia Rushton’s article.

Ireland, he says, has been on the “wrong road” since 1922, when an Irish government recognised by the British was established in Dublin and a year-long civil war broke out between that government and Republicans who refused to recognise the King of England as titular head of the Irish Free State. It will become clear that Sheehy Skeffington thinks that “the wrong road” stretches back not only to 1922 but to the 1916 Rising.

Why “wrong”? “The vast majority of Irish Republicans, past and present, had never and have never given a thought to what precisely the social and economic content of their Republic would be. For them the Republic is a bright symbol entirely devoid of significant content”

“The Irish people are terrified, I repeat, terrified, of facing the facts of social and economic life” which produce “unemployment in the midst of work crying out to be done” and mass migration from Ireland.

All “our” efforts have been directed towards setting up and maintaining “a tuppenny-halfpenny, third-rate capitalist statelet” in which an Irish ruling class can buy “big American cars” while poor “Paddy and Bridget” are “free to continue as under-educated labourers and maids... Our new Irish aristocrats of trade and politics have... far less social conscience than many” of the old Anglo-Irish ruling class.

He quotes James Connolly in 1897: “Remove the English army tomorrow, and hoist the Green Flag... [and] unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic, your efforts will be in vain” With an illustrative story he recalls that during the war of independence (1919-21) the IRA was used to protect the property of the rich against the poor.

Under a cross head, “No Solution Short of Socialism”, he goes on: Today “Ireland” is terrified of socialism and has been since James Connolly was murdered “with the approval of a whole section of the Irish ruling class”.

(Connolly, shot on 12 May 1916, was one of the last two of the 15 men shot after the suppression of the Rising. An outcry against the killings was gathering force. Connolly was recovering in jail from a badly wounded leg. For fear Connolly might escape with his life, the Irish Independent appeared with an editorial pointing out that some of the worst ring-leaders remained unpunished, side-by-side with a photograph of James Connolly).

Governments of the independent Irish state, and the physical-force Republicans, abstaining from politics, have both failed utterly.

Nothing will be right until “we... plan our whole economy” to produce for need.

Sheehy Skeffington concludes: “When, then, will Ireland dare to awake and shake off her fears? Have we yet indeed, indeed, reached the point where an Irish newspaper will even allow such a question to be put to its readers?”

This is good-hearted abstract socialist propaganda directed at the “general public” and at “Ireland”. Such socialist preaching would have its place in the arsenal of an Irish socialist movement that had other weapons in play as well, in the first place the class struggle of the proletariat. In essence he propounds a populist-nationalist version of socialism.

The reference to Connolly is a pious: Connolly is an icon in the canon of Irish nationalism, sworn to by everyone. Skeffington is explicitly pessimistic about the Irish working class.

The picture of the various Republican formations over the decades is a rhetorical device. They did know what they stood for socially — as his own recollection of the IRA protecting landlords and others during the Anglo-Irish War aptly illustrates.

Whoever found Sheehy Skeffington’s article and reprinted it evidently wants this sort of “socialism is the only answer” exposition.

A decade later, in the late 60s, this sort of abstract socialism will play a very bad role in disarming socialists and preparing the rise of the Provisional IRA, which offered what came to be accepted as practical, immediate, anti-imperialist politics. We will see what role the political descendants of the SR group played then.

SHEEHY SKEFFINGTON’S SECOND ARTICLE

The October 1957 SR carries a second article by Skeffington: “Ireland: Socialist Policy versus the IRA”. This too reads as something intended for an Irish audience. It is an extremely important article for its approach to the residual national question in Ireland.

Skeffington knows himself to represent a distinct, long-eclipsed strand in Irish politics.

Where Owen Sheehy Skeffington’s first article is vague,

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this is sharp and hard. He cuts through the prevailing form of mystifying Catholic middle-class nationalist cant about Partition. He defines the situation in Northern Ireland concretely and in the light of the principle of self-determination:

“Since [the counties of] Fermanagh and Tyrone never asked to be disjointed from the rest of Ireland, and have ever since consistently ‘opted out’ in the only constitutional manner open to them — by voting nationalist — the term ‘occupied counties’ might with justice be applied to them, but not to the other 4 counties, taken either singly or collectively.”

Measuring in existing counties does not adequately address the complex demography of the Six Counties, but in principle this is the whole issue, the modern “Irish question”, in a nutshell.

I need to digress to explain.

The fundamental fact is the existence of an Irish Protestant-Unionist minority, identifying themselves as British, who are the compact majority in north-east Ulster. The problem with Partition is that it does not cleanly, or as cleanly as the intermingling of Catholic-nationalists and Protestant-Unionists would allow, divide the peoples who proclaim conflicting national identities, Irish and British. It imprisons in the Protestant-Unionist state, against their will, a Catholic-nationalist population who are (in 1957) at least one in three of the 6-County population, and the majority in not much less than half the land area of the 6-County state. They are the majority not only in Fermanagh and Tyrone, but also, for example, in the second city of Northern Ireland, Derry, a mere two miles inside the 6 county border though in a predominantly Protestant-Unionist county.

Partition created a second Irish minority, the Catholic nationalists within the 6-County “Protestant” state. They are a bigger proportion of the 6-County population than the Protestant-Unionists would have been in a 32-County Ireland. This artificial second minority burns with a sense of British imperialist-imposed injustice and experiences daily discrimination and second-class citizenship at the hands of an insecure and fear-ridden Northern Ireland majority.

If it were not for this very large imprisoned Catholic minority, the northern state would have become a reality justified by the democratic will of the overwhelming majority of its citizens. Catholic-nationalist Ireland would have had to accept it and proceed to establish friendly links with the other Irish state. It would have had to translate the desire for a United Ireland into reasoned argument, practical proposals, and exploration of possible compromises.

With the big imprisoned Catholic minority, growing faster than the Protestant-Unionists, the 6-County state developed as an unstable quasi-police state for the minority and a place of uneasy dominance for its majority.

To return to Skeffington — he concludes that: “Consequently, useful activity to end Partition should be directed, on both sides of the Border, towards concerted action to better the living conditions of all our people”. Southern anti-Partitionists should “study what it has proved possible to do in the social field in the 6-Counties, and to decide what exactly would be the social content of the all-Ireland Republic of their dreams.”

This is a slightly bashful attempt to argue for “socialism” from the Welfare State which the reforming Labour Government of 1945 had brought to the Six Counties as part of the UK.

Skeffington quotes James Connolly in 1901: “Ireland as distinct from her people is nothing to me.”

He urges those who think as he does to “use their influence to turn the very real spirit of self-sacrifice of those young men who are now being organised for glamorous military forays — including murder if things go wrong — towards less glamorous”, but more constructive activities.

Some in Ireland glorify “the military method” and are not afraid of “another civil war”. “The military method is conventionally held to be a glorious one; and in some Irish circles today the prospect of another civil war is being received with startling equanimity — partly, perhaps, because of exaggerated and unthinking anti-Partitionist propaganda...” And also because of a sense of failure... to “apply the high principles of Connolly to our own people... Military action, however, is not the answer. It constitutes a backward step. Far more could in fact be achieved by intelligent organised passive resistance to injustice wherever it occurs; by extending the hand of friendship to all Northerners of goodwill...”

He is seriously mistaken that passive resistance and militarism are mutually exclusive: a variant of passive resistance and political agitation for “civil rights” created the mass base



for the militarism of the Provisional IRA after 1971, when the catastrophe of a decades long “civil war” — civil war burked by the efforts of the British state in Northern Ireland — engulfed the peoples there.

Skeffington quotes what his father said in favour of passive resistance, against the “military methods”, in a famous dispute with Thomas MacDonagh (one of the 15 leaders shot after the Easter Rising): Irish militarism can never be on as great a scale as England’s.

Anticipating how and why the “Civil Rights” movement at the end of the 1960s could generate the armed Provos, Owen Sheehy Skeffington wrote: “it is so much easier to organise people to pull triggers than to get them to think out exactly what they hope to achieve.”

He lambasts the Republican side in the 1922-3 civil war and after:

“Astonishing as it may appear, about half the courageous and self-sacrificing Republican movement did not know whether the proposed Treaty was or was not a forward step towards what they had been fighting for”.

This is far too rationalistic. The tragic and confused civil war of 1922-3 was fought by many rank and file Republicans in an incoherent opposition to the Establishment that had lined up behind section of Sinn Fein and the IRA led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith.

Skeffington: “Unless and until Ireland, North and South, manages radically to change the whole basis of production, distribution and finance, and to organise our economic life to provide as its first object for the fundamental needs of all our citizens along the clear socialist lines laid down by Connolly, no amount of heroic gun battles, blood sacrifice and militaristic exploits will get us one step nearer to solving the real problems facing our people”.

Conditions in Ireland, North and South, produce the IRA? “Yes!”. But: “British and French policy after World War One did much to produce Nazism. That does not mean that Nazism was consequently to be applauded, or that Hitler’s resort to force was the only method of gaining fair treatment for Germany, or, finally, that his effort was anything, in the event, but conspicuously disastrous for his own people.”

Sheehy Skeffington ends by demanding that the IRA and its supporters give “an immediate and unambiguous answer to the question as to what would be the social content of the republic which by violence they hope to establish for all Ireland.”

Another rhetorical device: there is no ambiguity about the social ideals of the IRA and Sinn Fein. They want a small commodity producers Ireland. In their ideas they were petty bourgeois representatives of small-scale private property. Some of them are openly anti-Semites.

In Labor Action Matt Merrigan has reported that there are fascist strains in Sinn Fein.

That this pacifistic “sectarian socialism” approach best sums up the thinking of the leaders of the Socialist Review group will subsequently become clear.

P. LAVIN: “IN DEFENCE OF THE IRA”

Two months later, the December 1957 Socialist Review carries an angry reply, to Sheehy Skeffington, “In Defence of the IRA”, by W.P. Lavin of Glasgow.

Lavin, a veteran of many decades in the labour movement, is, if I understand it, an Oehlerite, a sort of ultra-sectarian and ultra left “Trotskyist”, a Catholic and a fervent Irish nationalist. For all that, he is a sharp-witted man who knows where to hit his opponents. His attitudes and politics anticipate the pro-IRA British left of the 70s.

Sheehy Skeffington has made a “cowardly attack on the Irish resistance movement”; his article “could have been written by an official agent of the British government”. The IRA is not “produced” by Ireland but by the British government: “As long as there is a British Army in Ireland, the IRA will be there too”.

Lavin insists on being fair to Adolf Hitler. It is “British jingo opinion to blame Hitler and not imperialist rivalry for the World War.” It is a too “easy assumption that ‘Nazism’ is something more evil than capitalism”. The vehement 1840s radical nationalist, Fintan Lalor, was right: “Deliverance or death — deliverance, or this island a desert.”

Sheehy Skeffington would have had “short shrift” had he demanded of the French anti-German Resistance that they had to produce a blueprint for a new France!

The partition of Ireland was imposed by force, under Prime Minister Lloyd George’s threat to the Irish negotiators of “war without stint” as the alternative.

The IRA should seek “the good will of world opinion”? The “Hungarian counterparts of the Irish republican soldiers” had it a year ago, “and much good it did them!”

The IRA are “murderers”? Dr Fogarty, the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe, has written: “When the young men of Ireland hit back at their oppressors it is not for an old man like me to cry foul”.

(This archaic reference sums up Lavin’s position more than he may have understood. Michael Fogarty supported the Republican forces in the war of independence; was vehemently on the anti-Republican side in the civil war; and was an outspoken clerical-fascist Blueshirt bishop in the mid-30s. He sat on the Blueshirts’ platforms at public meeting in Ennis.)

Lavin sums up the militarist version of the politics Patricia Rushton has already presented in Socialist Review. The Belfast Government represents “a quisling minority with the mentality of... the backwoodsmen of Arkansas who [believe in] life, liberty and the pursuit of negroes.”

The Dublin politicians should be held in detestation by opponents of the Belfast “quisling” regime. They “have done little or nothing to reunite their country or to endeavour to have it take its old and rightful place amongst the nations of the earth”.

He concludes: “Partition has inflicted well-nigh irreparable injury upon the country”; and “Without the backing of the British forces there could be no partition of Ireland.”

The editors have put a cross-head in Lavin’s piece: “Neither Stormont nor Dublin” — echoing their own “Neither Washington nor Moscow”. In the Irish context, it evokes the “abstentionist” Republicans rejection of the two “Partitionist parliaments” in Belfast and Dublin!

An editorial reply in the same paper takes Lavin to task for saying the title had been “Ireland versus the IRA” when it had been “Socialist Policy Versus the IRA”. More debatably, and very oddly indeed: “Sheehy Skeffington did not hold Hitler responsible for World War Two but explicitly stated that British and French policies after 1918 did much to produce Nazism.” Sheehy Skeffington’s point was that though Britain and France had done much to produce Nazism, one could not therefore endorse Hitler’s war-making. Why is SR so defensive?

“If as [Lavin] suggests the IRA’s way is, and should be, Ireland’s way, why do they not, why does he not, show us where that way is leading? Why violence if it leads nowhere? If, indeed, it hinders us from getting anywhere.”

This ends the first discussion in Socialist Review. The commitment to “The reunification of an independent Ireland” remains in the programme printed in each issue.

The second discussion on Ireland, 1958

In the first, October 1958, issue of the now fortnightly Socialist Review, a new round of discussion is launched:

"From Northern Ireland, George Adair writes on the need for a United Irish Republic." This is an attempt to defend Socialist Review's point of view, and George Adair is most likely a pen name.

A nervous introduction by the editor (Michael Kidron) explains what SR think they are doing:

"SR stands for the unification of an independent Ireland. The following article from a correspondent in Northern Ireland shows something of the history of this demand in the socialist movement, the tragedy that has befallen it and how the future of the demand is tied up with the growth of a healthy, non-sectarian Labour movement in that country — Editor".

The first wave of intense IRA activity on the border has now thinned-out to an occasional raid. The Connolly Association and the Communist Party network in the Labour movement are starting a vigorous campaign on the "Mallon and Talbot case." These two Republicans are charged with murdering a policeman, Sergeant Owens, by booby-trap bomb. The Communist Party has sent one of its lawyer members, John Hostetler, to observe the trial and write a pamphlet arguing that the two Republicans, who might have faced the death penalty, are victims of a police frame up.

It was an early example of propaganda against the Six County state focusing up front on the real ill-treatment of the Catholic minority and their lack of certain civil rights, and used as an argument for the abolition of the Six County entity. This approach will in a decade mobilise a mass Catholic revolt, bring great international odium on the Six County sub-state, then lead to the IRA war and the abolition of the Belfast Protestant-Unionist government early in 1972.

Adair: "As bombs explode along the border the chance of Ireland ever reaching peace and unity appear to become more remote..." The IRA and the splinter group, Saor Uladh [Free Ulster] are trying "to cause such civil havoc and commotion as to bring the Irish problem to the forefront of world politics".

(This is a serious inflation of the impact of the IRA military campaign, which by now is in decline).

Adair: "The Irish republicans of today are fighting a rear-guard action... [They have] been deserted by [their] former leaders. [Taoiseach] Mr De Valera has given up the struggle against Partition."

This is wildly untrue from any viewpoint other than that of the IRA, for whom "the struggle against Partition" is war on the North and anyone who does not support war is abandoning the struggle. De Valera had never supported that viewpoint. Far from "giving up the struggle against Partition", the propaganda of De Valera and others, intensified and "internationalised" in the late forties, has helped the IRA rebuild its forces by restoring some credibility to the idea of "trying force" when the political, propagandist route, though it stirs up nationalist opinion, is seen to fail. The IRA border campaign is a child of the official 26 county state propaganda against partition.

A cross-head is inserted by the editors of Socialist Review, "Role of welfare state":

"The border which they are struggling to abolish is upheld by the Northern Ireland Government which, within the past 37 years, has consolidated itself into a permanent and practically unchallengeable regime".

The Welfare State has helped entrench the Stormont Government. And the 1949 Government of Ireland "Act has strongly reinforced Partition and as a loathsome by-product brought disunity, bitterness and chaos to Irish working class politics". (Patricia Rushton had said 18 months earlier that it was Partition which had brought the disunity and bitterness. As history, or current politics, the attribution is no less idiotic the second time round, especially when it seems to root the problem in the 1949 Act, which only formalised existing British policy.)

Under a crosshead, (Labour Party leader, Clement) "Attlee versus Connolly":

"Socialists had always believed that the working class movements of England and Ireland had so much in common that they would eventually end the partition that had been created by the Tories, and so open the way to unity, peace

and socialism in Ireland. Those socialists who understood the teachings (!) of James Connolly believed and still believe that the first step towards socialism in Ireland was to unite the working class. They abhorred the way the Tories had stirred up hatred and disunity by playing upon the religious differences and fears of the people".

Making "the Tories" responsible for all evil here serves to hide the fact of mass Protestant-Unionist militant support for partition.

W.P. LAVIN

W.P. Lavin comes back on stage in SR's first issue for November 1958 to nail Adair on his inner contradictions and inconsistencies and for his "sectarian socialist" attitude to the struggle for the goal which both Adair and Lavin say they share, a united Ireland:

If Adair believes in a united Ireland, why does he say that the Stormont regime has become permanent and is practically unchallengeable? No democrat can acquiesce in the continued existence "of this religiously bigoted and politically intolerant junta". This "fascist statelet" is "a Protestant state for a protestant people", excluding Catholics.

He rejects "the English Prime Minister's absurd contention that there was in the North of Ireland a 'homogeneous population alien in race, alien in sympathy, alien in tradition, alien in outlook'."

Both the "English Prime Minister" and Lavin are right: there is an "alien tradition; but its demarcation does not coincide with the Border.

Adair: "the Ireland Act [Britain's response to the Irish Free State's change of name and withdrawal from the Commonwealth, in 1949] strongly reinforced Partition, and as a loathsome by-product brought disunity, bitterness and chaos to Irish working class politics. Surely this should make every sincere democrat strive for a United Ireland?" Indeed, if Partition caused, or is the prime cause, of these things, this is true.

"Socialists have a clear duty to support the men who are fighting for the freedom of Ireland."

But some socialists hide from this duty because "the anti-Partitionists are not fighting on a socialist programme, and are therefore not entitled to socialist support..."

Lavin neatly nails their "sectarian socialist" politics in the name of a Leninist approach to national questions. The only thing wrong is that neither his picture of the society, nor theirs, corresponds to reality.

SOCIALIST REVIEW DROPS A SLOGAN

We come now to the final chapter in this story, Socialist Review's dropping of its slogan on Ireland. This is a good place to take stock so far, and to pose some questions.

From late 1955 Socialist Review has had close working relations with the publishers of Labor Action, the Independent Socialist League. Why is the knowledgeable and distinctive coverage written by Matt Merrigan in Labor Action ignored in the Socialist Review discussion?

Why does nobody pick up Skeffington's very important point about what was and was not reasonably definable as "Occupied Ireland"? The issues are misdefined because the nature of Partition is misdefined. The basic question of democratic relations between the different identities in Ireland is lost. The Irish Trotskyists' 1948 breakthrough, the idea of a united Ireland as a federal Ireland, is forgotten. Almost all participants in this discussion are trapped in a miasma of telling themselves, and repeating, ideological lies. They flounder about.

Advocacy of "the reunification of an independent Ireland" appears for the last time in the issue of SR for mid-February 1959. In the next issue, an editorial block accompanying a new "discussion" article explains why the call for a united Ireland has been dropped:

"Readers will notice that we have dropped the point relating to Ireland from 'What We Stand For'. We have found that Irish socialists themselves are unclear on the issue and feel it would be impudence on our part to define the right road for them. The discussion now opening in our columns will, we hope, serve to stimulate thought on the road to socialism in that country — Ed".

This may be unique in the history of the SR-IS-SWP tendency for the attempt to explain what they are doing. But it is also typical: they "open" a "discussion" by first changing the line, that is, adopting a new line, albeit a negative one! It is also simply fatuous: they hadn't known that there were disagreements amongst Irish socialists?

Why are they changing again? They must be uneasy about the position they have taken up to satisfy the new people in Nottingham. The IRA campaign, though it still twitches now and then in the form of isolated incidents, and will briefly flare up again in 1961, is by now a spent force. The Communist Party and the Connolly Association continue the war by political means, in the form of a political campaign in the British labour movement against "the Northern Ireland police state". With their wide range of "contacts" in the unions and in the Labour Party, they have made much political mileage with their campaign on behalf of the two IRA prisoners allegedly tortured into confessing to the killing of a policeman, Mallon and Talbot.

Something else is moving on the left too. The main Trotskyist organisation, the Healy group, has begun to break new ground on the Irish question. In the early 50s their paper Socialist Outlook has carried routine middle-class nationalist accounts of Ireland.

But now, since 1957, they have recruited a number of Irish militants from the Communist Party. The most important of them is Brian Behan, a member of the Communist Party Executive Committee

Behan has long objected to the non-socialist character of the Communist Party's Irish work, and to the pseudo-nationalism purveyed by the Connolly Association. So have a number of other Irish members or supporters of the Communist Party.

Under their influence the Healy group's paper Newsletter reports Ireland in terms of the class struggle. They report on the doings of socialists such as the one-time Health Minister Noel Browne. Then reported on the 26 Counties in terms of class and working-class experience.

They have a solid influence for a while among militant Irish building workers in London.

As a rule the Socialist Review Group tends to follow the lead of the Healyites. Against nuclear weapons, for example, they copy the Healyite slogan "Black the Bomb and the Bases". ("Black" means boycott, ban, "hot-cargo").

The Healyites' new approach will have exerted some pressure on the Socialist Review Group.

SOCIALIST REVIEW PRESENTS ITS POINT OF VIEW: NOEL HARRIS

The new discussion article accompanying SR's editorial explanation of a change of line is too quirky to be anything other than the work of a real person, as distinct from a name of convenience assumed by one of SR's inner core. Yet it is Harris who presents their alternative to the slogan they have dropped. customers

Harris explains what SR's change of line is designed to combat: "The passing of resolutions calling for the 'withdrawal of British troops from Ireland', 'Self-Determination for Ireland', or some similar objective has become common practice among British trade union and Labour Party branches and other socialist organisations and groups".

Those who vote for such things are "on the whole" "well-meaning socialists" but their attention is "usually drawn to the position of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland by Irish exiles who have been, unfortunately, blinded to facts by virtue of having been engendered with a fierce nationalism which has been deliberately confused with religious bigotry by years of clerical indoctrination".

We have seen that Socialist Review has so far seemed to accept the fundamental case from this point of view.

On behalf of SR, Harris now appeals to "all Irishmen" to face the "bitter" facts.

He agrees that: "The 'state' of Northern Ireland was founded undemocratically and by a Tory confidence trick" after "the overwhelming majority of the Irish people had demonstrated their wish for political independence". This way of formulating the issue shows that Harris hasn't faced the fact that within this figure is hidden a compact minority

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in, roughly, the four counties around Belfast, who do not want independence under a Dublin – and as they believe, Catholic – government.

By “confidence trick” Harris seems to mean the fomenting of religious divisions. But, he says, astonishingly, there is no denying that “the confidence trick was highly effective and that Northern Ireland was established as ‘an integral part of the United Kingdom’ with the almost complete support of the people living within its boundaries.” They “still support the continuance of the state of Northern Ireland”. To ignore this “would be comparable with the US’s policy with the[Stalinist] People’s Republic of China” (refusal to recognise it).

The level of ignorance or clumsy mendacity involved in the claim that the Six County state has had and has the support of almost all its people, though it is breathtaking, is only in extreme expression on the general ignorance of this spokesman for Socialist Review. Skeffington has already discussed the religious-political composition of the peoples of the six counties. Hasn’t Harris read Skeffington’s article? Haven’t the editors of Socialist Review? And where was Cliff, one-time resident in Ireland?

Under the cross-head, “Divide and rule”, Harris writes that the “confidence trick” has been to divide and rule on the basis of religious differences, like India, Palestine and Cyprus.

“Suspicion and antagonism are engendered by granting small favours and rights to the minority group — in the Irish case the Protestants — at the expense of the majority, the Roman Catholics.

“In this way the heroic struggle of the Irish peasants for basic human rights and dignities degenerated into a struggle between the lackeys of British Imperialism and the agents of the Irish bourgeoisie and aristocracy, [and] rival churches.

“In this gradual change of direction of the Irish struggle, great socialists like Fintan Lalor and James Connolly were used and cruelly betrayed. The very mention of their names has become almost heresy in the South and the people in the North are almost totally ignorant of them”.

Harris has a vague notion of history as a conspiracy produced through manipulation by an all-powerful ruling class. His ignorance of what he writes about is, I repeat, astonishing. So is that of the editors of Socialist Review.

For instance, Fintan Lalor was not a socialist. Harris is all handed-down, garbled, pseudo-understanding. Essentially he doesn’t know what he is talking about. Not even when what he’s saying has some sense to it, as with the following:

“Many believe that socialism can never be achieved in a divided country... This... is true up to a point, but it is sheer fantasy, indeed folly, to contend, as they do that territorial unity must be the first goal of Irish socialists”. That much at least is true.

Ireland is “governed by two basically similar bourgeois social classes who are ever jousting for power... And what good can be obtained by supporting one against the other?... Establishing the absolute authority of one of the rival factions... [is] to strengthen this faction, which is a retrograde step for socialists”.

So national conflicts and struggles for national liberation concern only the bourgeoisie? If this were teased out coherently, it would amount to ultra-leftism – dismissing national questions in general and in all circumstances where the bourgeoisie is at the head of a nation or a fragment of a nation struggling for independence.

To “the division of the Irish people”, writes Harris, “a catalyst, socialism, must be applied... The job of establishing socialism amongst the Irish people must be tackled within the existing framework. The old maxim, ‘divide and conquer’, must be turned on the ruling classes after the goal of a United Irish Socialist Party has been achieved, and this only after socialism has been separately established North and South of the border.”

This is “an enormous task”.

The bourgeoisie in the South has convinced the people that “the existence of the state of Northern Ireland is the sole cause of the social injustice, poverty and deprivation”. The Northern “Tories” have “managed to convince their people that the existence of slightly higher standards of living in the North is entirely due to the separate status of the Six Counties.”

The “people” of Northern Ireland fear that a “merger with the Catholic South” would bring depression of living standards to “the low level of the latter area” (which in Harris’s previous paragraph was only “slightly” different...).

Both “bourgeois governments... realise that their main enemy is not one another but socialism”. To prevent this, the



Southern government “adopts tactics which are not far behind those of Franco’s fascist Spain”, banning books and proscribing political parties and promoting “relentless attacks” from the pulpit.

The Northern Ireland governments are “slightly more subtle”. They cite “the aforementioned resolutions” in British labour movement bodies to imply that the British trade union and socialist movement supports “the petty-bourgeois terrorist organisation, the Irish Republican Army”, to inoculate them against socialism.

Therefore, British socialists should not pass “these resolutions” but instead establish links with socialists, North and South, “and possibly act as a kind of mediator between them”. Papers like Socialist Review should publicise “the gross betrayal of the Irish working class revolutionary movement by the petty-bourgeois middle class leadership right through history”.

Harris concludes: “Only by a policy of separately establishing socialism, North and South, and exposing both ‘Orange’ and ‘green’ Tories will Ireland ever be ‘a nation once again’.”

Here Harris, and SR, whose spokesperson on this issue he evidently is, neatly invert the Stalinist scheme of “first national liberation and unity, then socialism”. Now it is first socialism, in fact two socialisms, and then Irish unity. Their version is upside down, like a tree with its roots in the air.

This article is a strange hodge-podge of middle-class nationalist history, half-formulated important truths — the split Irish bourgeoisie — and would-be cunning schemes. History is a plaything of bourgeois manipulators. He has no idea of such things as the autonomy of culture, including religion, as factors in history. He more or less fades out of his picture the aspect of Partition which will dominate Irish politics for the next half-century, the Northern Ireland Catholic people.

He makes little reference to Northern Ireland realities — other than to assume that the welfare state has united the population of Northern Ireland in support of Partition.

Harris, like Skeffington, has provided soft targets for the redoubtable militant representative of Irish Catholic nationalism in these discussions, Lavin.

DOMINIC BEHAN

SR’s paper is running out of steam and, having become a fortnightly at the start of 1958, is about to revert to monthly publication. There is no new issue of SR until Easter 1959, when SR publishes a rebuttal of Noel Harris by Dominic Behan.

Dominic Behan is a brother of Brian, the ex-CP building-trade militant who is chairman of the Healyite Socialist Labour League, and of the playwright Brendan Behan. The brothers come from a Stalinist-Republican family in Dublin.

Dominic is becoming well known as a folk singer. He is the author of two ballads about two IRA martyrs in the Border Campaign, killed on a border raid on New Year’s Day, 1957, both of which had gained tremendous popularity in Ireland.

One is a rollicking, mindless piece of militaristic vain-glory, celebrating one of the IRA’s clerical fascists, Sean Sabht [John South] of Garryowen. The other, The Patriot Game, is a thoughtful and truthful examination of the IRA outlook, put in the mouth of the 17-year old, Fergal O’Hanlon.

Behan’s arguments provide a valuable snapshot of the mind of an Irish Socialist Republican of that time.

Behan, quoting Sam Goldwyn, finds Noel Harris’ piece “filled with clichés, and not one of them new”. No one except the IRA is “carrying on any struggle against the forces of occupation, North or South of the Border; political or purely physical force.”

He admits he is what Harris “and the Daily Mail would dub a petty-bourgeois terrorist; and for all that I’m a socialist!”

Before “criticising the young men who had taken up arms against John Bull”, we should examine the conditions that gave rise to the IRA. For nearly 800 years, “not a single decade went by but Irishmen asserted in blood their unquenchable right to independence and self-determination.”

The Fenians (of the 1860s) “played more than a small part in founding the great British Chartist movement” (of the 1840s). James Connolly and Liam Mellows were socialists and Republicans. In 1936 Frank Ryan — “did you ever hear of him?” — led en to fight Franco who came from the organisation of “petty-bourgeois terrorists”.

The Irish Republican Army policy is (he emphasises, in capitals) “for national independence and an end to occupation, either British or American”.

Behan denounces Andy Boyd (of the Communist Party in Northern Ireland, who will in 1969 be the correspondent there of the influential left-Labour weekly Tribune). Boyd has not mentioned Partition in his recent election address.

“Without British military occupation” of Ireland... the socialist movement “would have developed as it would in lands where no national problem exists...”

Behan asks: how can the “ground be made ready for a really progressive struggle?” The workers of Ireland “should be asked” to support the self-determination demand of the Republicans”. Causes of poverty “directly attributable to the economic partition of the country should be correctly attributed...”

“The labour movement in Britain must be made to demand that not one penny of the British taxpayers’ money must now be spent on bolstering a tottering Empire’s lackeys’ institutions in Ireland against the expressed wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people”.

He finishes: “The Partition of Ireland is wrong! The occupation of any part of Ireland by a foreign army is wrong! Two ‘separate’ socialisms is a false, dangerous argument... designed by jingoists to betray the Irish Workers’ Republic. The only truly progressive slogan for us can be Unity and Socialism. Get to hell out of here, John Bull and let us clear up the mess ourselves.”

Behan’s article is a valuable picture of the Irish Stalinist-socialist republican mindset at that time. His account of Irish — and English — labour movement history is pure moonshine. So is his stuff about the Irish separatists rising in every decade of 800 years of history.

He is critical of the Irish Stalinists in the North for not campaigning against Partition, as the separately organised Stalinists do in the South and in Britain. But he is saturated with the CP-honed view of the “Irish problem” and of Irish history.

Of course he is right about the idea of two Irish socialisms

being absurd – yet this will be IS's starting point when Ireland comes to the top of the agenda at the end of 1968.

Behan's third slogan-demand, "withdraw subsidies", also comes from the Stalinists (1955).

What does it mean? What is "demanded" of the British government here in relation to "British Occupied Ireland"? That it stop subsidising the social services, the dole in the mainly Catholic areas of high unemployment, the NHS, and an education system vastly superior to that of the South.

That is, act to savagely reduce the living standards of the people of Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant. That is, to expel the whole of the Six Counties working class from the benefits won by the British labour movement in the post-World-War-Two Welfare State.

It is a demand to do to Northern Ireland what Thatcher will do to Britain 20 years later, only vastly more so.

Did anything so bizarre ever appear in the pages of an honest socialist newspaper — even as discussion? It rivals the German Stalinists' "After Hitler, our turn next".

Where does the demand originate? It might possibly come from some Southern bourgeois whose brain had been pickled in Catholic chauvinism for too long, or who had been in a lunatic asylum since 1921, if you could find one! Its honest meaning would be the cry: "Stop corrupting our workers" — a sort of adde-pated nationalist "ultra-leftism".

In fact it comes from pseudo-Irish nationalists, eager to display their ardour for a cause they don't really care about, which they embrace to serve some other goal, people concerned almost entirely with something other than Ireland, her peoples or her working class. That is where Dominic Behan has picked it up.

It originated with the British Communist Party's Irish front group, the Connolly Association (in 1955). Note it well, reader. You will encounter it again in an unexpected place, in the form of the demand to "End British Subsidies".

LAVIN

In *Socialist Review* of 1 March 1959, Patrick Lavin has the last word.

"I note that you have dropped from your programme the idea of an independent and unified Ireland. I had thought that your attitude on this question was the outcome of an impartial consideration of the facts of the case. However, it now appears that I was mistaken. It would seem that you have altered your programme because some pseudo-socialists in Ireland are "unclear" on the issue. This seems to me to be a perilously near approach to the attitude of the legendary Yankee politician who assured his hearers that "Them's my sentiments, and if you don't like them they can be scrapped"."

Lavin hits at Noel Harris's inconsistency in not drawing nationalist conclusions from the nationalist tale he tells of Irish history. Harris has said that "the overwhelming majority of the Irish people had demonstrated their wish for political independence (which is true)". He has also said that Northern Ireland was established with the "almost complete support of the people within its boundaries". That is untrue.

Harris himself has said that Northern Ireland was set up by a Tory "confidence trick". The nationalists at that time were the majority in Armagh, Fermanagh, Tyrone, south County Down, and Derry [City]. Only in Antrim and North County Down were the "Tories" in a majority. There were 93,000 Catholics in Belfast.

Lavin's wrap-around talk of "the majority" obscures the existence of a compact minority in north-east Ulster.

And he avoids the question of the overall population ratio in the 6 Counties. In fact he falsifies it and spins a fairytale. The ratio is two to one in favour of the Protestant-Unionists.

Lavin: "Because the fraud by which Northern Ireland was established was successful, Mr. Harris thinks that the bastard legislature of Stormont has a right to exist. Is not this the old abominable doctrine that the end justifies the means, which, universally acted upon, would drive the very idea of decency from the minds of men?"

The Stormont gang "and their pitiable dupes" are obsessed by an ignorant hatred of the Catholic Church, a hatred "hard to distinguish from insanity." Lavin ends by asking: "why only the Irish, of all the peoples struggling to be free, should be told to postpone their national liberation till a socialist society has been established?"

Lavin, who is, it seems, both a Catholic and a long-time revolutionary socialist, is a pure voice of the strange fusion of "Communism" and Catholic Irish nationalism that still, even now, more than half a century later, dominates on the Irish, British and international left.

The 1968-9 discussion in IS (SWP) and its consequences

At the start of the Northern Ireland crisis in 1968, the dominant conception of the "Irish question" on the British left was essentially that of middle-class Irish nationalism.

The partition of Ireland was a brutal British imperialist imposition on Ireland; it was contrary to democracy and the rights of the Irish majority; and it created Protestant-Catholic division where otherwise there would be none or little.

By the late 1960s, Stalinists, some of them trained by the Connolly Association, and notably Dr Roy Johnstone, had effectively gained control of what there was of the IRA. The most momentous consequence of that fact would be the appearance of the Provisional IRA, as a split from the Stalinist-led movement, in December 1969.

The two discussions in Socialist Worker's forerunner, Socialist Review, in 1957 and 1958, surveyed in this pamphlet, had been politically important. But they were only discussions, and in a very small circle of political people. The Socialist Review group had small public presence and no influence on events either in Ireland or in the British labour movement.

The discussion within IS (SWP) in 1969 would have consequences in the world outside IS – great consequences.

INFLUENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The organisation now had an important influence in Northern Ireland, where a group of IS's co-thinkers played an important role in the agitation that would lead to its collapse into the first stage of civil war in August 1969 – and, then, for 38 years, to the British Army taking on the role of scaffolding to sustain the Northern Ireland sub-state, while Britain attempted to re-model it.

The group which published Socialist Worker, IS (today SWP), was then the liveliest element in Britain's activist left, and the forerunners of Workers' Liberty were then organised as the Trotskyist Tendency inside IS. The 1969 debate surveyed in this pamphlet was within IS.

The 1957-58 discussions were unknown to most of the participants in the disputes of 1969. But, through those participants who did know them, the 1957-8 exchanges plainly shaped the response of IS to the crisis that began when police, oblivious of the TV cameras "watching" them, batoned peaceful demonstrators in Derry on 5 October 1968.

The 1957-8 discussion had ended with the SR group dropping a recently-adopted position for Irish unity on the stated grounds, ludicrous and preposterous, that they had unexpectedly discovered that there were differences amongst Irish socialists themselves on this question.

The implicit conclusion of the group from its circuit through championing Irish unity to dropping it again was that socialism should be preached, not Irish nationalism. There was no necessary political disgrace in taking that position — not until where it involved them in evading basic issues pushed to the fore by the political reality as it developed in Ireland after October 1968.

After 1958, the SR group had simply ceased to concern itself with Ireland. Only two further pieces on Ireland had appeared in Socialist Review before it ceased publication in 1962. One was an article in 1962 by Alasdair McIntyre, at that point the organisation's most prominent intellectual. He simply rehashed the Irish nationalist account of Irish history. The second was a strange article which reviewed a work by Father Dennis Fahey, a rabidly anti-Semitic Irish clerical-fascist equivalent of the well-known 1930s fascist priest in the USA, Father Coughlin, with whom he had connections, without telling the readers who and what Fahey was.

On 5 October 1968 the realities of Northern Ireland, of Protestant Six County state sectarianism and of the oppression of Catholics there, erupted on to the TV screens in Britain and across the world. To many observers it was like a scene from the black civil rights movements in the southern USA, which had roused the people of the world against the white racists for the last decade – except that the brutalisers and the brutalised were both white.

In response to the international outcry provoked by the

scenes in Derry, the leaders of IS decided that they would campaign in the British labour movement on Northern Ireland. Given their conclusions in 1958, this presented them with awkward political dilemmas.

The Catholic mobilisation in Northern Ireland was organised around the demand for civil rights and Protestant-Catholic equality. Or as some put it, "British standards". Many prominent civil rights people talked of socialism, and all of them were careful to avoid the question of Partition, "the constitutional question".

But the entire logic of Catholic mobilisation for civil rights pointed directly to the basic civil right which the Catholics in Northern Ireland lacked – self-determination. Everything flowed from the fact that they were an artificially created minority in an artificially demarcated sub-state.

The hard-line Protestant-Orange leaders, such as William Craig, northern Ireland Minister for Home Affairs when the crisis broke, saw that immediately. They had seen it before 5 October. Denials by the main civil rights leaders carried no conviction with the Orange population.

At the beginning of its "turn" to Irish work, IS found itself in agreement with the civil rights leaders that the Irish national question should not be raised. So did their co-thinkers in Northern Ireland. So did the Stalinist leaders of the Republican movement.

Immediately after 5 October, Socialist Worker, which had recently become a weekly, responded with business-as-usual reports without any indication that there were special problems in Northern Ireland. There was only an oppressive state and its victims, "people", "workers".

As the Catholic civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, and a Protestant backlash against it, escalated in 1968, the typical response of Socialist Worker was exemplified in an article by Paul Foot. On 26 October Foot reported under the headline: "Do-It-Yourself Politics Threatens Northern Ireland's Police Rule".

Foot gave Socialist Worker readers, who in the main would know next to nothing of the realities of Northern Ireland, details of the discrimination in housing, jobs, and votes against Catholics. Politically speaking, the important part of the article, defining IS's approach, was this: "The exploited people of Northern Ireland, denied even the semblance of parliamentary democracy available to the rest of the UK, are beginning to 'do it themselves', to act to seize the basic rights and services denied them by the intolerant and reactionary government". (In fact the voting system for the election of Northern Ireland's two Westminster MPs was not interfered with. Election-rigging mainly concerned the local councils in Catholic-majority areas).

Direct action showed the way. The ruling Ulster Unionist Party set religious sectarianism to divide the workers.

Foot noted the upsurge of student militancy for civil rights. The "terror of the authorities at the prospect of workers and students acting for themselves can be measured by the readiness of William Craig [Stormont home secretary, who had banned the 5 October civil rights march, and then set the Protestant-dominated police, the RUC, on the marchers] known variously as the Papadopoulos [leader of the military regime in Greece after the 1967 coup] and Lardner-Burke [minister of justice in the white-minority UDI government of Ian Smith in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe] of Ulster..."

MILITANCY THE CENTRAL VALUE

All of the IS of 1968 was there. There had been a strong strain of quasi-anarchism in IS's youth segment. Direct action, "do-it-yourself" reforms, and "militancy" were the central values.

Alongside the quasi-anarchism in Foot's article, and of IS's typical approach then, was, right from the start, a lack of awareness of, or a refusal to notice, central features of the reality of Northern Ireland.

In Foot's picture the fact that "the people" in revolt were only (a section of) the Catholic minority was resolutely

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pushed aside. He depicted a worker and student uprising against the Northern Ireland equivalent of a Greek military dictator or a white supremacist in Africa.

This was a view of Northern Ireland seen through spectacles that filtered out everything that was specific to Northern Ireland. For the next year, anyone relying only on Socialist Worker for information about Northern Ireland would not have been able to make sense of events there. The national, communal, denominational, sectarian realities of the real Northern Ireland were not admitted into the pages of Socialist Worker until August 1969, when panic led the IS leaders to face realities (sort of), and to abandon their fantasies.

The first serious discussion of Ireland and the organisation's turn to Irish work took place at the Executive Committee on 12 December 1968.

The muddle and confusion that characterised IS in 1968 was thick and dense at the very beginning of the discussion on Ireland. Gery Lawless was invited to attend. He was a fringe journalist and "professional Irishman" in the London and British left, a self-righteous Irish chauvinist who liked to denounce the British labour movement either for not being sufficiently active on the "Irish question", or for "telling Irish people what to do", that is, holding political opinions on Ireland independent of Irish politics, especially himself.

Lawless — putting a line agreed on with IS's "Irish experts", Tony Cliff and John Palmer — gave the "keynote speech". The minutes record what he said.

"Comrade L felt that the British working class had a racist, chauvinist attitude towards the Irish question. The British left was not very much better informed. IS should educate its own members, as this attitude was also amongst them.

"If IS is serious, it should not simply organise demonstration on Ireland but try to educate the working class (and IS members) to campaign and organise on the Irish question (remembering there are over a million Irishmen in this country, mostly workers). There was perhaps scope for a campaign on Vietnam Solidarity Campaign lines which should be more fruitful because it could bring workers into contact with the revolutionary left. The campaign should take in questions coming from the south as well, although main emphasis on the North".

The committee duly agreed:

"a) To educate the group (and the British left, especially revolutionary Marxists)

"b) Start an Irish campaign

"c) Assist the re-formation of an Irish group".

The scene at this meeting, with the professional Irishman Gery Lawless telling off the committee and denouncing the British working class for being racists and chauvinists on Ireland, was very like a once well-known cartoon by Jules Feiffer from about the same time, in which a Black Panther is shown in a number of panels abusing a white upper-class cocktail-party audience until the last panel — in which, like a flagellating sex-worker confronting a satisfied customer, he has his hand out for payment.

IRISH NATIONALISM WITHOUT SELF-DETERMINATION, "SECTARIAN SOCIALISM" WITHOUT CALL FOR WORKERS' REPUBLIC

The political conclusions and proposals for action from the EC meeting appeared in Socialist Worker on 4 January, on the eve of a meeting of the broader National Committee that would discuss and, notionally, decide.

The article, "Ulster: what the left must do", was the work of Gery Lawless, under the pen name "Sean Reed".

"The Northern worker will never be won to a programme which calls for the absorption of the Six Counties into the present Southern regime with its Rome rule in the schools which tends to confirm his ever-present fear that a break with Orange Toryism will open the floodgates and relegate him to the position of a second-class citizen.

"He will only be won for the establishment of a Republic when it is clear in his mind that what is envisaged is a Workers' Republic in which he as a worker will control his own destiny without fear of Thames or Tiber.

"The complexity of the situation has in the past been used by many in the labour movement in Britain as an excuse for doing nothing, or else indulging in the old British habit of telling the Irish how to run their own affairs.

"This British... attitude to Ireland will come as no surprise to Irish revolutionary socialists, who have long recognised if not accepted the inability of the labour movement in Britain to show an understanding of the Irish problem.

"The result of this attitude in practice is that even the best-informed British left-wing organisations fail to take any part



in the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland.

"What is to be done? First and foremost British socialists must refrain from penning long high-flown theoretical articles (which all end up telling Irish socialists what to do) and instead launch a campaign of solidarity with the Irish movement. In this campaign, the best thing British socialists can do is demand:

"(1) The withdrawal of all British troops from Ireland;

"(2) An end to the supply of British military equipment to the Northern Irish Tory Party and para-military Black Hundreds, the B-Specials;

"(3) Stop British subsidies to the Tory police state of Northern Ireland".

As the Trotskyist Tendency (forerunner of Workers' Liberty) wrote:

"The first two demands are anti-imperialist demands. But a strange anti-imperialism — which called for certain things and then, surprisingly, avoided the essential and logical conclusion: the call for the right of self-determination for Ireland as a unit.

"To raise the self-determination demand would have been to raise the question of the Border, because to have any meaning in the present state of Irish politics self-determination must mean self-determination for those explicitly denied it: the Catholics of Northern Ireland. It must mean to regard the existing Irish state structures as fluid".

The third demand was one which nobody had heard of for ten years, and which nobody else in either Britain or Ireland at that time supported — withdraw British subsidies from Northern Ireland. The slogan had made a fleeting appearance in the 1957-8 discussion, presented there by Dominic Behan, who in turn had probably got it from a 1955 Connolly Association pamphlet.

And the article missed out on two key slogans, for which its authors were called to task by the National Committee. Self-determination for Ireland as a whole; an Irish Workers Republic. In fact the text of the Socialist Worker article implicitly ruled out self-determination: the worker "will only be won for the... Republic when it is clear... that [it] is a Workers' Republic".

Where the Stalinists presented a "stages theory", first the Republic (united Ireland), then the workers' republic, so did IS. IS's version was: first win socialism, and then Irish unity (self-determination) could be the next stage.

Here the 1969 discussion continued from where IS left off in 1957-58. It was a mercy that the full absurd scenario of 1958, of effort to win two Irish workers' republics, separately, and then proceed to a united workers' republic, was not spelled out.

Despite the reference to socialism as a necessary first stage before Irish unity, the IS demands were not explicitly for socialism, or, in Irish parlance, for the Workers' Republic. This was a very odd omission in the political basis for a campaign in the British labour movement where there were hundreds of thousands of Irish workers and workers of recent Irish descent.

The IS Executive had chosen as its model the Communist Party's front organisation, the Connolly Association. The Connolly Association presented itself to Irish workers in Britain as a pseudo-nationalist organisation with a focus on

the labour movement. The IS leaders wanted to present IS as a pseudo-liberal, militant civil rights front.

At the National Committee, two additional slogans were proposed: for self-determination for Ireland as a whole, and for an Irish Workers' Republic.

The members of the Executive, with the exception of Constance Lever, opposed adding the demand for self-determination, though it was carried by a big majority. They opposed because, they said, it pre-empted a future decision by the Irish people. And they opposed the Workers' Republic for pretty much the same reasons.

Exactly half those present voted to add the slogan for a Workers' Republic to the list. The chairman, Jim Higgins, gave his second, casting, vote against the Workers' Republic demand, and it fell.

IS was a democratic organisation in allowing such free discussion. It was not democratic in terms of real membership or National Committee control of what the organisation did or said. Self-determination appeared in lists of slogans, but was always interpreted by and in the spirit of those who had opposed it at the National Committee. They had a strongly manipulative notion of their relation with the membership of the group.

John Palmer chose to interpret the self-determination demand like this in the International Socialism journal, no. 36:

"[The demand] also has the advantage that it allows for a possible decision by the whole people of Ireland to merge the two statelets on the basis of some degree of autonomy for the Protestants..."

Interpreted thus, "self-determination" allowed the leadership to relegate the whole thing to a distant future and still treat the imperialist set-up, the Border, etc., as given, as unmitigable. Ultimately this was to be one of the factors leading to the acceptance of British troops after August.

PUSHING FOR BREAKDOWN — AND THEN?

After the January 1969 NC, IS entered a phase that would last until mid-August 1969, with some important zigzags.

In Northern Ireland the IS people, controlling a left-wing student group, People's Democracy, formed the militant wing of the ongoing civil rights agitation. That is, in practice, the most reckless and irresponsible and damn-the-consequences segment.

People's Democracy was at that stage a very loose, structureless organisation. When the Cameron Commission reported on the October events, it presented a damning picture of PD for, among other things, its lack of democratic structures.

In January 1969 PD organised a "Long March" from Belfast to Derry which was harassed by Orangemen with the collusion of the police. Serious inter-communal rioting broke out in Derry when the marchers arrived there.

In terms of publicity about the United Kingdom's backyard sectarian state, it had an effect similar to 5 October. In terms of Northern Ireland politics, it helped polarise the communities further.

IS's coverage of Northern Ireland publicised and lauded the "militants" and direct-actionists. In April 1969, a member of PD, Bernadette Devlin (afterwards known as McAlisley), was elected to the Westminster Parliament for

Trotskyists debate Ireland

the mid-Ulster constituency. She was called the “unity” candidate, but really, and although she proclaimed herself a socialist, that referred to Catholic unity within the constituency.

In London she worked with IS, holding meetings on building sites and in some works canteens. In May IS set up a front organisation, the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign. Mysteriously, given the decisions in January, the campaign’s platform included a call for a workers’ republic and did not include a call for withdrawing British subsidies.

IS never attempted to make an in-depth analysis of Northern Ireland or Ireland as a whole. Decades later, writing to Jim Higgins, who was working on a history of the organisation, John Palmer, one of the authors of the “centralised” chaos in the organisation’s Irish work in 1969, admitted that the organisation never had worked out a coherent line on Ireland. We told him and the others that often enough back in 1969!

IS’s line was shaped by organisational considerations and the desire to “second” People’s Democracy and keep in with its leaders. In fact, the ICRSC was in its politics not seriously different from the Communist Party front, the Connolly Association. The main difference was in that one organisation fronted for the Communist Party and the other for IS.

SPURIOUS “GOOD REASONS” FOR “TROOPS OUT”, AND THEN COLLAPSE INTO EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR TROOPS

In May, there was a front-page of Socialist Worker with a raucous call for troops out. Why was IS for troops out? Because, said Socialist Worker, the only role the British Army could play in Northern Ireland was to back up the sectarian Six County state.

That was obviously absurd. One of the things that had destabilised Northern Ireland was the pressure from the Labour government elected in October 1964 to reform the Orange-sectarian characteristics of the sub-state. Some Labour politicians who had the ear of prime minister Harold Wilson or were even in the government had campaigned against the Northern Ireland regime, sometimes with the Connolly Association. One of them, Paul Rose, a future judge, had published a pamphlet about the Manchester Martyrs.

They wanted to turn Northern Ireland into an ordinary West European liberal state – to graft normal bourgeois democratic practices on to the sectarian structures on which the sub-state rested. This was like trying to graft the head of a human being on to the body of a dog; it could not work. Even today the northern Irish sub-state rests on an intricate bureaucratised system of sectarian balances; it is more or less at peace for now, but it is probably not stable in the longer term.

As an appreciation of modern Irish reality, IS’s explanation of why it was for troops out, and not for the demand of the Labour parliamentary left to dismantle Belfast home rule in the Six Counties and impose direct rule from London, was, to put it bluntly, deeply foolish.

It was an example of IS leaders using whatever “good reasons” or “good arguments” they could find for their immediate, politico-organisational defined, objective, and never mind the underlying implications.

In August 1969 the British Army would go on to the streets of Northern Ireland (to the cheering of the Northern Ireland Catholics) to stop sectarian civil war, and the British government would push aside the Belfast government. It didn’t abolish it yet, but it appointed British civil servants to shadow their Northern Irish equivalents from 1969 until March 1972, when the Belfast government was abolished. Yes, indeed, the British army shored up the six county state – but only to begin to dismantle its regime.

The IS leaders’ foolish assertion that the only conceivable role the British Army could play in Northern Ireland was to back up the Unionist sectarian state prepared them, in their panic at the beginning of the breakdown of the Six County state in August 1969, and their disorientation about the role the Army was obviously playing then, to turn themselves inside out. In terms of political appreciation of reality they had been standing on their heads: now suddenly they flipped onto their feet. They effectively endorsed the British Army intervention, while covering themselves by warning that the troops were “not angels” and would do bad things in the long term.

There was continuity, however. They followed PD. The leader of PD, Michael Farrell, publicly called for the British Army to be sent in on the first day of the sectarian fighting in August 1969. Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin were slower about it, but they too called for the British Army to be deployed. They took public responsibility for the Army and



talked up its benign role in northern Ireland.

So did IS in Socialist Worker.

Suddenly the people who had irrationally headlined “troops out” in May (when the troops were not intervening) dropped all their previous arguments when the troops did intervene.

The problem was not just the upturning by reality of the nonsense reason they had given for demanding troops out. It was also the logic of what PD had been doing “on the ground” in Northern Ireland.

The Orange state existed. It had the militant support of the big majority of its citizens. So had its Unionist government. Its supporters were the compact majority in most of the territory of the Six County state. In part the sub-state was destabilised in face of British pressure for reform and Catholic agitation within its borders because of the political ineptitude of its political leaders and the effective demagoguery of their Unionist sectarian opponents, such as Ian Paisley, who led a revolt of working-class Protestant unionists against the Orange-Unionist political elite.

There was opposition to the “liberal” Unionists like Terence O’Neill (then Northern Ireland prime minister) within the Unionist party from men like William Craig.

LIBERAL UNIONISTS THE “MAIN ENEMY”?

The mainstream civil rights agitators backed the more liberal Unionists. PD proclaimed the liberal Unionists the main enemy.

Eamonn McCann compared the liberal Unionists to oppressors wearing slippers and the hardliners to oppressors wearing hobnail boots. This became a very common metaphor with people like Bernadette Devlin.

They drew the bizarre political conclusion that there was no substantial difference, since both were Unionists! All proportions guarded, it was a little like the attitude of the Stalinists to the Nazis and Social Democrats in Germany before Hitler came to power.

Ian Paisley publicly claimed that Bernadette Devlin had turned up at his doorstep to propose a united front with him and his working-class supporters against the liberal Unionist government leaders. She did not deny this bit of crass ultra-left absurdity. Nor did her PD, or IS, collaborators dissociate themselves from her action.

The IS leaders did nothing to re-educate the PD leaders.

It was not necessary to follow the mainstream Civil Rights leaders in giving political support and credence to the liberal Unionists, or to take responsibility for what they did and did not do. It was however necessary to recognise political and social reality – and to understand the balance of forces in Northern Ireland. If the “liberal unionist” were not to prevail then the extreme sectarians would. That would be a step towards civil war. (But then some of the PD people – Cyril Toman, for instance – had openly proclaimed the slogan “civil rights or civil war”.)

It was the provocative and too-often misjudged “militancy” of PD that distinguished them from the mainstream Civil Rights movement, not their operational politics.

PD’s course could logically lead to one of two conclusions. Either sectarian civil war, out of which, after invasion by the Southern army and/or Britain, would come repartition and the hiving-off of the Catholic majority areas along the border.

Or: intervention by the British state to smother civil war before it properly got going.

Everything before the August explosion suggested that the outcome of breakdown would be British intervention rather than 26-county state intervention and repartition. And so it was. The Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, made a speech saying the 26 county government would not indefinitely “stand idly by” in face of what was happening in Northern Ireland. But he did.

There was widespread identification in Northern Ireland among Catholics with the US civil rights movement of black people (though in fact the levels of oppression were not really comparable). The PD leaders were also influenced by the experience of the American movement.

In the USA, however, the civil rights marches in white supremacist areas, the sit downs against segregation and the challenges to the dominant racists, made sense only on the assumption that there was a higher authority that could and would “intervene”. Michael Farrell’s very quick call on the British government – not the 26 county government, to which nationalist politicians such as Eddie McAteer appealed for protection – to send troops in August may indicate that all along he saw Northern Ireland, too, in terms of prodding a higher authority (from London) to intervene.

In any case Farrell, McCann and Devlin were followed immediately by IS. Effectively they had moved onto the ground of the Labour parliamentary left which demanded London direct rule as the alternative to majority rule – that is Protestant rule – in the sectarian Unionist six county state.

The Trotskyist Tendency had criticised the “provocative” activities of PD and asked what the political perspective could be within the Six County state from such stoking-the-fire activities.

The entire logic of what PD had done and IS backed and lauded had to be, if not sectarian civil war, then British direct rule. That logic crashed into place in August 1969 and afterwards.

In face of the erupting Catholic-Protestant civil war, IS buckled politically. IS “woke up” in August 1969 and discovered that, after all, there were for the British state in Northern Ireland and, without saying so, for direct rule. The political collapse provoked a crisis in IS.

“Groups which begin a struggle without a definite program have been characterised as political bandits... The Lovestoneites”, wrote American Trotskyist James P Cannon of a socialist group in the 1930s with many of the same traits as IS/SWP, “were able and talented people, but they had no definite principles...”

“Their politics was always determined for them by external pressure. The Lovestoneites never had any independent program of their own. They were never able to develop one”.

The gist of the 1969 “Troops Out” dispute

“Tactics contradict principles” — IS/SWP founder Tony Cliff (quoted by Ian Birchall, International Socialism no.127)

In August 1969, IS/SWP suddenly switched from raucous agitation for “British troops out” of Northern Ireland (on the spurious grounds that all the troops would ever do is back up the Orange sectarian regime) to de facto support for the troops as providing a “breathing space”.

The Trotskyist Tendency, forerunner of Workers’ Liberty, had criticised the earlier shallow “Troops Out” agitation, and now also criticised the de facto support for the troops.

The debate hinged on the relation between “agitation” and “propaganda”, as the following extracts show. They refer to the classic Marxist statement on that relation, by G V Plekhanov in *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats in the Famine (1891)*. “Agitation is also propaganda, but propaganda that takes place in particular circumstances, that is in circumstances in which even those who would not normally pay any attention are forced to listen to the propagandist’s words. Propaganda is agitation that is conducted in the normal everyday course of the life of a particular country.

“If I had to clarify further the relationship between agitation and propaganda I should add that the propagandist conveys many ideas to a single person or to a few people, whereas the agitator conveys only one or a few ideas, but he conveys them to a whole mass of people, sometimes to almost the entire population of a particular locality”.

1. Calls to action

Stephen Marks, Socialist Worker, 18 September 1969

Those who... demand... withdrawal in the present situation... do not understand the difference between propaganda and agitation and between strategy and tactics. Marxism is not an alternative description of the world but a guide to action. And slogans are not just an expression of the fine feeling of those who utter them, nor even a stylistic device of the summing-up of a political argument. For those involved in a struggle they are calls to action.

To say the immediate enemy in Ulster is the British troops is incorrect. At the present time it is the Paisleyites who threaten murder and, in particular, the physical elimination of those in whose hands lie the key to any future socialist strategy for Ireland. To prevent illusion in the role of the troops, and to prepare for a future turn in the situation when the demolition of the barricades may be needed in the interests of British capital itself, and not merely of its local retainers, socialists must constantly explain the roll of the troops, as Socialist Worker has done.

But those who would raise the demand for withdrawal now must explain how they would implement that demand if they were behind the barricades in Derry or Belfast. Would they fire on the troops now, and encourage others to do the same? If so, they would merely add their bullets to those of the Paisleyites and provoke an immediate clash in a situation which would lead to a massacre. But if they would not take this responsibility on themselves they would presumably be reduced to getting the troops out by persuasion — a difficult task!

To combine a demand for withdrawal with a demand for the arming of Catholic workers is to solve the problem only at the level of the mounting of slogans. In real life, the two demands are in contradiction if both raised at the present time, for the arming of the Catholics is dependent on the precarious breathing space the presence of the troops provides. But if the demand for withdrawal in the present situation does not flow from a false evaluation of the relation of forces, it can only mean one of two things:

- either the conscious advocacy of a massacre now, presumably as a means of raising the level of struggle (a demand we would invite the supporters to raise behind the barricades);

- or else it could be justified with the excuse that raising the slogan will not lead to the departure of the troops and therefore we need not reckon with the consequences. On this we need only say those who do not take their own slogans seriously cannot expect others to do so.

2. The aim is education

Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet, *IS and Ireland*

Marks on behalf of the EC made the following case: In the long term the troops and the Paisleyites serve the same interests; in the short term there was a contradiction between them, which could be exploited by socialists to avoid the losses and blows which might have been dealt the Catholics and their leaders had the clash — between Stormont and its helpers, and the Catholics — been allowed to take its course without British intervention. The troops hid the effect of “freezing” the conflict, “buying time”, providing a “breathing space” for the Catholics. Self-defence was not being abandoned, merely “postponed” while arming would take place. The contradiction between the troops and the Paisleyites was immediately the main contradiction — the contradiction between the troops (and the state and ruling class they represented) and the barricades and workers’ self-defence would only become acute “at some future turn”. Therefore in the “short term” the troops should stay, but in the long run they should go.

To fit this, a formula was worked out whereby in slogans and headlines the troops shouldn’t be mentioned, but in the text we should “warn” about their future role. In subsequent arguments the headlines and slogans were labelled “agitation”, the small type was the “propaganda”. We were told that one must “understand the difference between propaganda and agitation”...

Underlying these arguments... was an absolute lack of clarity on the basic question. Why do we make demands? What are they for? Who are they addressed to? Throughout the discussions on the troops, the political effects (as opposed to the alleged physical effects) on the people of Belfast and Derry of either having or not having the “Withdraw Troops” demand was never considered. The role of demands, of agitation and propaganda, in raising and developing consciousness and self-confidence among the workers, never came into it. The only people we were talking to, according to the conceptions of Marks and the EC, were the British authorities.

Unless we have a clear conception that the reason for putting demands, for making agitation and propaganda, is directly to try to raise the level of consciousness, to show the necessary direction of the struggle, to sharpen that struggle so that the masses, or at least those of the vanguard that we reach, learn the best political lessons from it, we are hamstrung from the start, we are tied down to a reformist conception — to a stance of petitioning the powers that be, looking to their actions and decisions for alleviation, rather than to the direct action of the working class. If that were the case, we would never make a demand that wasn’t likely to be realised immediately.

Moreover, if we do not see the various forms of “communication” (demands, slogans, agitation, propaganda, headlines and small print) as necessarily bound together by a single aim and programme, with the single purpose of raising consciousness (whether this be “purely” literary or whether it be linked with immediate action) then what is there to link them, to prevent them flying apart into contradictions and inconsistencies?

HOW MARTYNOV, HAVING RENDERED PLEKHANOV MORE PROFOUND, WAS REBORN IN I.S.

For revolutionaries, there can be no contradiction between the content of agitation, propaganda and theory. The difference is one of form, of style and technique, and of scale.

The content and meaning does not differ according to whether action might or might not follow, or whether that action might be on mass scale or on a tiny scale. This is the essential meaning of the well known definition of Plekhanov: “A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator present only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people”.

Marks, having no conception of the purpose of demands, departed quite explicitly from this formula: “Of course, this very situation” (of contradictions, with the troops’ presence

being approved) “increases the need to expose on every occasion in propaganda and discussion [our emphasis] the role the British troops are playing; and the side on which they must ultimately come down. But those who conclude that raising the demand for withdrawal in the present situation [emphasis Marks] must therefore follow, do not understand the difference between propaganda and agitation.”

We say one thing in “discussion and propaganda” and another “in the present situation”.

He continued: “Marxism is not an alternative description of the world but a guide to action. And slogans are not just an expression of the fine feelings of those who utter them, or even a stylistic device for the summing up of a political argument. For those involved in a struggle they are calls to action”.

Marks might have been paraphrasing Martynov, in that passage which Lenin (in *What is to be Done?*) sarcastically described as rendering Plekhanov more profound. “By agitation, in the strict sense of the word, we would understand calling the masses to certain concrete actions...” In reply, Lenin demonstrated that all types of political writing were more or less directly connected with “action”. One couldn’t make that a criterion for separating out one type of work.

“To single out a third sphere, or third function, of practical activity [as well as propaganda and agitation] and to include in this third function ‘calling the masses to certain concrete actions’ is sheer nonsense, because the ‘call’, as a single act, either naturally and inevitably supplements the theoretical tract, propagandist pamphlet, and agitational speech or represents a purely executive function”.

Lenin gave an example of a “concrete action”, the signing of petitions: “The call for this action comes directly from the theoreticians, the propagandists and the agitators, and, indirectly, from those workers who carry the petition lists to the factories and to private houses to get signatures.” (See Chapter III section B for the rest of the argument.)

Explicit though he is about “calls to action”, Marks is still not clear what it’s all about. In discussions, when challenged to define agitation and propaganda, he and other EC members have trotted out the Plekhanov definition, not realising where they had departed from it. The practice, however, shows clearly just which method and definition they do adhere to.

The point about the Plekhanov formulation is, of course that the “single idea” put over in agitation is not just any old idea but a correct idea; not in antagonism to the larger complex of ideas that is propaganda, but flowing out of it and, again, leading back to it. Taking this definition together with IS’s practice, the only thing it can mean is that you tell most of your audience (if only by your failure to tell them otherwise, not to mention polemics such as Marks’ — in which he repeatedly emphasises that the troops are indispensable to the Catholic workers) that the troops “for the moment” and “in the present situation” are doing a good job; while you tell an initiated few, who probably don’t really need to be told anyway, that things aren’t so simple.

The justification for having a different line for agitation and propaganda was that given by Marks and Martynov: that agitation must lead to action, but propaganda is about the general, overall picture, about the future. Only propaganda is seen as educational. Martynov, the Russian “Economist”, counterposed agitation leading to action to Plekhanov’s propaganda and agitation, because he wanted to fight for reformism and to “free” his reformist tactics from a too rigorous connection with revolutionary Marxist propaganda and the agitation spun from it. Marks and IS use the very same distinction, for the reason that they want to free themselves to react impressionistically with regard to the long-term interests of the class. They want to free themselves from theory, programme and basic principles.

EDUCATION AND ACTION

To say that agitation and propaganda are both essentially educational is not to say that they don’t lead to action.

It is to say that education and action must be integrated, must interact, that the most important and chief reason for anything to be said and done is that it educates the masses and raises their consciousness, preferably in action. The distinction between agitation and propaganda being a matter of scale, the immediate effect often varies in scale.

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The agitation of a mass party, counting among its members hundreds or thousands of the grassroots leaders of the working class, might lead more directly to mass action — because it is directed immediately to the masses — than would its propaganda, or the propaganda and agitation of a much smaller group.

Even if one accepted the view of Marks and Martynov, that there is a fundamental difference in aims between agitation and propaganda, it is yet another question whether this can be applied to IS. If it is not big enough for its agitation to be a “call to action” in any practical sense, then even if one wants to follow Martynov, one is nevertheless bound by the Plekhanov conception.

On the level of a factory, or maybe in certain conditions in an industry, IS can agitate and can aspire to have mass influence which can at times either lead to action or affect action being taken. On the level of national and international politics, however, IS is confined to a propaganda role. On Ireland, propaganda and agitation converge for a group like IS. IS could only agitate in the Plekhanov sense, seizing on illuminating facts to illustrate and highlight propaganda, summing up and underlining an argument in a slogan or demand. We could not make “calls to action” to the masses in Derry and Belfast, or even “to the masses” in Britain — except in the spirit of propaganda and education. Any other estimation of IS’s influence is illusory.

3. The greater threat

Reply to the Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet by John Palmer and Stephen Marks on behalf of the IS/SWP leadership

“How Martynov, having rendered Plekhanov more profound, was reborn in IS - as a member of Workers’ Fight” [i.e. the Trotskyist Tendency]...

The first proposition, the correct one, is that there must be no contradiction between strategy and tactics, propaganda and agitation, headlines and text, or between any of the forms of communication of a socialist organisation. The second proposition, confounded with the first, is that there must be no difference in the slogans etc. advanced in different situations, whatever the objective situation, relation of forces, contradictions in the enemy camp etc. Thus they confound opposition to a stages theory with the denial that stages exist at all.

In Ireland IS conceded that the immediate threat from the Paisleyite armed gangs was greater than it was from the British troops, but argued against any demobilisation politically or militarily, called for no confidence in concessions to the troops, constantly warned that once they had contained Paisleyism they would turn on the Catholic workers and the Left, and called for the extension of the struggle to the South.

4. When were the stages?

Trotskyist Tendency reply to Palmer and Marks

In his article *Fine Slogans and Grim Reality* (Socialist Worker 18 September 1969) Comrade Marks identifies agitation (slogans) with calls to action, and propaganda (small print) with education. This is the mistake Martynov made in “rendering Plekhanov more profound”.

Lenin showed that agitation and propaganda are both educational and could both lead to action, and that they both came from a common source — our programme and analysis of reality. Martynov made this artificial distinction between agitation and propaganda because he wanted to be a Marxist in “discussion and propaganda” but not in his “calls to action”.

Comrades Marks and Palmer don’t bother to defend the article. Instead they decide that attack is the best form of defence. Instead of them having an opportunist conception of the difference between agitation and propaganda, we have apparently a sectarian conception of the difference — i.e. we don’t relate our tactics to reality, we are abstract propagandists. Unfortunately they don’t try to substantiate this assertion.

If it was sectarian to say that the troops were not there with parallel interests to the Catholic workers, but to attack them (and not in the distant future but here and now, even if not physically) and crystallise this with the slogan *British Troops Out* — then we plead guilty. But who was it who ignored reality?

In his article Marks talked about “a future turn in the situ-



The aftermath of an IRA bombing in Coventry in 1939

US Trotskyists debate in 1939

In April 1939 the US Trotskyist magazine *The New Internationalist* published an article by William Morgan (a pseudonym), lauding the IRA. The IRA had given Britain an ultimatum to withdraw from Northern Ireland and, when it was ignored, declared war on Britain. It carried out a few bombings in England. “Morgan” retold the populist-nationalist version of Irish history.

Sherman Stanley The Irish Question

The New Internationalist, May 1939

To the Editors: In the April issue of *The New Internationalist* there appeared an article by William Morgan on the subject of Ireland and its “revived” nationalist movement.

I find myself to be in complete disagreement with its evaluation of the activities of the Irish Republican Army as a revolutionary force and believe that the attitude of our international movement has not been correctly represented. The article is incorrect from two aspects: (1) some of its statements are wrong politically; (2) its omissions are of a serious nature.

Our general approach to the national revolutionary movements in the world colonial empires of Britain, France, America, etc. may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Clearly establishing the utmost solidarity with the people of the oppressed colonial or semi-colonial nation, we direct our major attack against the imperialist oppressor. In the case of Ireland, our energetic support goes to the people of Ireland struggling for full independence from British imperialism.

To us, the British Empire ranks among the most reactionary forces in world history and its complete breakup and destruction is our goal. This is elementary.

2. Our attitude towards the colonial nationalist movement is that of active participation in its practical struggles against the imperial power and the utmost political solidarity in each progressive step forward it makes.

3. Towards the petty-bourgeois leadership of the colonial movements (Chiang Kai-shek, Gandhi, de la Torre, etc.) and their reactionary activities we retain complete independence

action when the demolition of the barricades may be needed in the interests of British capital itself”. Now according to his logic, when the troops did start taking down the barricades (that very same week) then the first stage — troops plus Catholics v. Paisleyites — had finished. Shouldn’t IS then have re-incorporated the demand for troops to go?

of the right to attack and criticize. If not for these reactionary leaders world imperialism would long ago have crumbled away. They are our enemies. Against their doctrines we advance the transitional program of the Fourth International as outlined in the colonial section of our World Congress thesis. In its most general form this is the program of the permanent revolution.

The above may appear to be a repetition of the familiar, but it is my opinion that Ireland and its nationalist movement are partly an exception to the above general pattern. Ireland is a semi-colonial country that has developed a capitalist and landlord ruling class of its own, capable of independent rule. In recent years—under the de Valera régime—it has marched along the road of clerico-fascism, similar in many respects to the Dolfuss Austrian type. A reading of the new Irish Constitution will verify this. The White Steed—a new Irish play—is, I think, a fine artistic representation of the present Irish government.

This Irish bourgeoisie has succeeded in so demoralizing and isolating the nationalist forces that—in the shape of a revived IRA—it has resorted to tactics that can only increase its isolation from Ireland’s and England’s workers. Far from witnessing the upsurge that comrade Morgan speaks of, it appears to me that the movement of Ireland’s people is indeed at a low ebb. What indications are there of a mass stirring of the people in support of the IRA? Ireland’s labor movement is practically down to zero, its organized peasant movement is non-existent, there are no reports of labor or peasant strikes, demonstrations on behalf of those IRA men who were imprisoned for their bombing activities. In a word, there are no objective facts to prove that Ireland is stirring along class lines. Certainly the bombings have aroused no support among England’s workers. One could not for an instant, for example, compare the present Irish nationalist movement with that of India. In India—despite the treacherous leadership of Gandhi and his followers—there is an upsurge because it is based upon a mighty class force, namely, the throwing into action of millions of workers and peasants organized into their labor and peasant unions and struggling for independent expression in the ranks of the Nationalist Congress. What action beyond the activities of an isolated group is taking place in Ireland today? What to comrade Morgan is a “revival” appears to me as the gestures of despairing petty bourgeois, who are incapable of getting down to rock-bottom and attempting to revive the dormant labor and peasant movements.

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It is necessary to be unsparingly critical of the “program” of this IRA group. There is no question that we aid and protect these men from the vengeance of the British bloodhounds. This is not the issue. But the fact that they have no program whatsoever—beyond that of bombing—only makes it more necessary for us to point out its obvious limitations. Comrade Morgan does not do this. Furthermore, in practise, the IRA has shown itself to be extremely reactionary in many instances. Its ambiguous relations with the traitor de Valera, its not so ambiguous relations with the fascist Franco régime in Spain, its kow-towing to the Irish Catholic Church, its supreme unconcern with labor, peasant and socialist problems—all of these clearly stamp the IRA as an exceptionally backward and limited nationalist movement. By no means do I state that it has no possibilities. That remains to be seen. But we cannot bury our critical attitude towards the IRA merely because it appears to be the only movement.

The question of the bombings is secondary and solely a matter of the most effective tactics to be employed. That the IRA considers it to be the only worthwhile activity to engage in only reveals its almost incredible backwardness. In my opinion, they have been ineffective in arousing support and action among the people. Morgan calls them the carefully planned acts of “revolutionists”. Perhaps, but what of it? What sort of substitute are they for protest meetings, demonstrations, strikes, etc.? In what way do they further or help revive the mass movement? How do they awake England’s workers to Ireland’s situation? Where is the evidence of the healthy effect of these bombings? As a tactic they are as effective as a fast by Mahatma Gandhi (and incidentally belong in the same category!). Gandhi too, “plans” his fasts! He plans them so that he will appear to the masses as a substitute for their action, as their redeemer and savior. When Gandhi fasts India stands still and is “saved”—for the British!

In addition, there are two serious omissions in the article. First, comrade Morgan mentions the newly formed Irish Republican Brotherhood as a progressive development of the IRA. He says these men “go about their business”. What is their business and how does it differ from that of the IRA? Precisely what is the IRB?

Secondly—and most important—there is absolutely not a word of material or information on the present Irish labor movement—in its trade union and socialist form. Or is there no labor movement?

I strongly suggest that what is needed is a more scientific and exhaustive study of the Irish question—one based less on emotional longings and wishful-thinking than Morgan has given us.

V.F. Ireland and Ulster

The New International, June 1939

(I exchanged letters in about 1970 with George Lavan Weissman, an SWP-USA old-timer, about who “V F” might have been. Nobody Weissman could contact in the SWP remembered).

The importance of the Irish question is increased manifold by the presence in America, England, and Australia of millions of Irish proletarians, whose attitude toward our movement is largely dependent upon our position on Ireland. It is therefore mandatory that we face the problem soberly and analytically.

Comrade Morgan’s article is unfortunately compounded of pure emotion, and in addition involves numerous distortions and mis-statements of fact. (For example, contrary to Morgan’s statements, Ireland never provided the bulk of the wheat consumed in England, and the famine of 1846 was caused not by the repeal of the Corn Laws but by the potato blight of the preceding year).

Sympathy for Ireland’s wrongs and hatred of the British empire are not a sufficient basis for deducing the proper position on a subject of such complexity. The vital considerations are: 1) What are the consequences of the old policies pursued, and 2) What policies can achieve the desired results.

Ireland alone of all British possessions may be said to have become a colony by accident rather than design. British policy always aimed at absorption rather than segregation of the Irish. Had this aim been achieved (as in the case of the Scotch and Welsh), Ireland would today be part of the British

monarchy, and the Irish would be petty stockholders in the great British Empire.

This policy failed primarily because the Protestant Reformation came at a time when Ireland was not ready for it. The Irish remained Catholic. Onerous burdens and disabilities were placed upon them by a monarchy striving to consolidate its absolutism on the basis of religious uniformity and centralization. The aim of these measures was not to set the conquered apart from the conquerors, but simply to stamp out heterodoxy. Irish Protestants suffered no persecution. The Irish were oppressed not as Irish but as Catholics, and English Catholics were subjected to much the same treatment.

The early rebellious movements in Ireland contained no progressive features. During the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries, the Irish fought not for separation from Britain, but simply for the restoration of Stuart despotism: the Stuarts, being Catholic, would not enforce anti-Catholic legislation. This in turn caused an intensification of the repression. But however non-national the oppression may have been in its origins, it was thoroughly national in its incidence, and the problem entered into the consciousness of the Irish as a “national” problem.

By the middle of the Nineteenth century, the Irish had secured the removal of virtually all the Catholic disabilities. The Irish were the legal equals of the British. But the difference between the living standards of the two peoples was a glaring fact. The Irish attributed their situation to their English landlords. But in actual fact, the methods of exploitation practised in Ireland differed only in minor details from the methods practised in England. The poverty of the Irish was the consequence of their birth rate. During the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries the population of both England and Ireland increased rapidly. But whereas in England the agrarian increment was drained off by the growing towns, Ireland experienced no parallel development. The agricultural population became redundant Landlords in England, as well as in Ireland, charged whatever rents the traffic would bear. But whereas in England there were a thousand tenants bidding for every thousand farms, in Ireland there were two or three times that number. The Irish tenants, competing for a very limited acreage, bid the rents up and their labor down. When five thousand workers apply for one thousand jobs, a similar development takes place. But whereas industrial unemployment is the product of capitalist decay, Irish agricultural unemployment was due simply to the fact that the habitable earth, and Ireland in particular, is limited in size. Had the landlords been Catholic instead of Protestant, and residents instead of absentees, the situation would not have differed materially. Even national liberation was and is no cure for such a situation. Unfortunately one cannot guarantee that, even in a state of complete and utter national independence, even under a proletarian dictatorship, a tiny island with no minerals, an indifferent climate, and a poor soil will be able to provide eight million persons with strawberries and cream. Under capitalism in 1850 it failed to provide them with potatoes.

During the last years of the Nineteenth and the early years of the Twentieth century, the bulk of the land of Ireland was transferred from the absentee landlords to the native tenants, as a result of Britain lending the tenants the purchase money. This brought a slight improvement. More important was the reduction of the population by half as a result of emigration.

Since 1922 Ireland has had its own independent government. Under the Cosgrave protection policy, a native bourgeoisie was hatched, to flap its puny wings impotently. In 1937 De Valera secured the ending of the land annuity payments, the surrender of British forts within the Free State, and the severance of connection with the British crown.

These various steps in the direction of national liberation were progressive. Whatever the historical origins of a sentiment of nationality, it is wholly legitimate for it to seek expression in the formation of an independent state. It is the duty of revolutionists to support such national movements, but it is equally their duty to note the point at which a progressive nationalism becomes reactionary.

Ireland today is an independent capitalist nation, with a native bourgeoisie, a class of native landowners, an independent army, and a republican form of government. The standard of living of the masses can be raised only by the socialist development of industry (to the limited extent possible) and the reduction of the population. The latter can be achieved only by large-scale migration—no longer possible under world capitalism—or by a steep reduction of the birth rate—prevented by bourgeois and church forces. Ireland, in short, has solved the problems of the national revolution, and

confronts today the problem of social reorganization.

But the Irish ruling class has an effective means of stifling revolutionary development. It has only to appeal to ancient grievances and anti-British sentiment: perfidious Albion is the source of all woes. The bourgeoisie must keep this agitation within bounds; it cannot alienate its chief customer. But the workers do not understand the business aspect of the situation; they throw bombs.

The nominal basis of the agitation, the fact which causes some to denominate Ireland an oppressed nation and others to call her a British colony, is the British occupation of six counties of Ulster. In the agitation of the nationalists, Ulster is represented as a child torn from its mother’s bosom, longing to return, and thwarted only by superior force.

In actuality, two-thirds of the population of Ulster is Protestant and British. Far from desiring union with Ireland, the Ulsterians (or Orangemen) are fanatically anti-Irish, and are ready to resist Irish “reunification” with gun in hand. The demand of the Irish that Britain withdraw her garrison from Ulster is not the demand for the self-determination of an oppressed people; it is a demand for a hunting license to shoot Protestants. The Irish physical-force people are here fighting a wholly reactionary struggle against the principle of self-determination.

The arguments adduced in favour of reunification are 1) historic right, 2) natural frontiers doctrine, 3) presence in Ulster of many Irish, 4) military insecurity against British attack. A similar set of arguments could be adduced to justify Hungary’s ambition in Transylvania or Poland’s seizure of the Corridor. Like its Hungarian prototype, Irish expansionism is also based far less upon the economic requirements of the ruling class than upon the “revisionist” sentiment of the broad masses. The longing of every people for a large territory, an economically viable state, and a secure frontier, are not without much justification. But the realities of the present situation make impossible the gratification of these demands. It is impossible to “free” certain peoples without enslaving others. A “just” set of boundary lines for the states of Europe is an unrealizable fantasy. The task of the European proletariat is not to rectify frontiers but to destroy them.

The incorporation of Ulster into Ireland would not obliterate the boundary line; it would perpetuate it. Thenceforth the struggle between the two national and religious groups would constitute the sole content of Irish political and cultural life. Class struggle and socialism would recede far into the background. The solidarizing of the exploited of both national groups would be delayed for decades.

The consequences of nationalist agitation in Ireland are already manifest in Ulster. Irish revisionism has driven the British population into the arms of Toryism: only the Tories can be counted on to block reunification. Politics in Ulster is the struggle between Irish candidates and Tory candidates; no liberal or labor current exists among the British there. If Ulster is today a stronghold of the British Empire, the Irish revisionists have themselves to thank for it.

Sixteen years of Irish revisionism have not erased the Ulster frontier, nor have they produced any class solidarity between British and Irish workers. Bombing British bridges and post offices, far from winning converts among the British, will only deepen the existing fissure between the two peoples; to the British workers the Irish will appear as homicidal maniacs, not exploited brothers.

The Irish workers must resolutely reverse their policies of the last sixteen years. They must renounce revisionist aims, and set themselves the task of overthrowing their own native exploiters. The seizure of power by the Irish workers and peasants would destroy at once the present firm solidarity of the British workers with their capitalists. The revolution might be extended in short order to Ulster and even Britain herself. Only in this manner will the liberation of the Irish from exploitation become possible.

It is thus the firm responsibility of the Fourth International to tell the Irish: We cannot support your demand for Ulster, for it is reactionary. You must recognize the principle of self-determination, and turn your energies against your class oppressors. Only thus can you win the support of the British workers, without which no Irish movement can succeed.

In taking this position we will greatly intensify the difficulties of propagandizing the Irish. That cannot be helped. When we tell the Polish workers that Poland is not entitled to the frontiers of John Sobieski, or the Turkish workers that Turkey is not entitled to the frontiers of Suleiman the Magnificent, we also do not increase our popularity. But we cannot endorse policies that in their consequences are reactionary. To free the masses from the enslavement of their emotions and prejudices is our first responsibility.

William John McAusland Irish Labour and the Bombings

The New International, August 1939

Though Ireland's population is a mere four millions the Irish question is of international revolutionary importance both because of Ireland's strategic position athwart Britain and because there are some twenty million folk of immediate Irish extraction outside Ireland who are liable to be swayed by Irish nationalist sentiment.

In the States that sentiment operating through Clan na Gael was a big factor in blocking an Anglo-American alliance under Roosevelt the First.

Comrade Sherman Stanley is correct in demanding a scientific and exhaustive study of the Irish question but I'm not sure such a study wouldn't bring him pretty close to comrade Morgan. If the Irish Republican Army should become a valuable revolutionary force in the future it will be in some degree due to the sympathetic efforts to understand their problems and to guide them of such as comrade Morgan. Casual cracking-down on them for failure to work in accordance with principles of which most of them have never heard would merely tend to drive them towards fascism.

Before I go any further I want to assure comrade Stanley that the I.R.A. has no relations, ambiguous or otherwise, with De Valera or Franco nor can I imagine what led him to suppose otherwise.

My own credential for writing on Irish affairs, particularly matters regarding the Border dispute between Eire and Northern Ireland, is as follows. I was born in Northern Ireland of Down Protestants. I was brought up in Tyrone and East Donegal among a mixed Protestant and Catholic population, and I learned the Irish language living among the native Gaelic-speaking peasantry of West Donegal. My Presbyterian paternal great-grandfather fought against the British in Down in 1798 as a member of the United Irishmen, their aim an Irish Republic with "The Rights of Man" as their textbook and I fought in the Irish Republican Army, retiring from its reserve seven odd years ago as a protest against the action of G.H.Q. in court-martialing and expelling Charlie Gilmore (another Ulster Protestant by birth) for, without official authorization, using firearms to defend Communist party headquarters in Dublin against a gang of "Catholic Action" hoodlums. For the past twenty years I've lived and worked on and off in Dublin and I served with the I.R.A. in the West, so I reckon to understand both the Catholic and the Protestant, Eire and Northern Ireland side to the Border issue, and I try to look at it as a socialist.

The New International is not a military technical journal, but some appreciation of Ireland's strategic position is necessary for understanding of Britain's desire to hold Ireland, of Hitler's desire to meddle in Irish affairs. Look at any map of the world and you'll see that Ireland, most westerly point of Europe, lies athwart Europe-North American sea and air routes; that Ireland's deeply indented western coastline from Cork to Londonderry affords several magnificent deep water harbors, some almost completely land-locked, in which fleets of the largest battleships can ride at anchor and scores of hide-outs for submarines, hydroplanes, and fast surface boats; that Ireland's saucer-like central plain fringed by mountain ranges is potentially a vast aerodrome; that could a hard-pressed British Government shift key personnel and key industries to the West of Ireland they would be shifting them no doubt only a few hundred miles further from Continental air bases but, nevertheless, putting another belt of sea-crossing in the way.

Ireland as ally would be a hell of an asset to Britain in war. But no matter what bargains Mr. de Valera may strike, so long as Ireland is partitioned and is denied full international recognition as an independent republic a big section of Irish folk is going to consider the British Government Enemy No. 1, is going to adopt passive resistance and sabotage the moment war breaks out and—face it frankly—is likely enough to go the whole hog, facilitate and link up with landing in Ireland of anti-British forces wherever they come from. In point of fact it would be easier for the British to deal with an

independent Ireland run by a hostile Government if that Government joined forces with the Axis Powers, the British could then walk in and squelch opposition by overwhelming military force. Instead they face a situation in which it is hard for them to distinguish between friend and foe and they fear to alienate the former by cracking down on the latter. And Mr. de Valera knows very well what he is up against from his own folk — the present strategy of the Eire Army is based, not upon danger of enemy air raids, but upon danger of enemy landings on coast supported at point of landing by I.R.A. and by I.R.A. risings in the rear.

Ireland unfree is not going to be an ally of Britain, so far as the plain people are concerned irrespective of their Governments, and what socially-conscious folk ought to try to stop is the likely progress of rank-and-file Irish nationalism from being rightly and naturally anti-British Empire to being ignorantly and shamefully pro-fascist.

The vast majority of Irish industrial workers and many professional workers are fully organized in labor unions which are linked into one organism by the Irish Trade Union Congress. A weakness is the rivalry between native unions and British unions which operate here but are affiliated to the T.U.C.

In point of fact for an industrially backward country Ireland has been remarkably progressive as regards labor unionism and has sent missionaries abroad as potent in their way as were the Irish Christian missionaries of early mediaeval days — Bronterre O'Brien and Feargus O'Connor of the Chartist movement, James Connolly and James Larkin are names that spring to mind.

Labor unionism here is remarkably poor in theory but strong in practice. By that I mean that the Irish workers, while economically illiterate, tend in practise not merely to fight sectionally for better wages and conditions but as a whole show a high standard of class solidarity. There is no worse insult to an Irishman than to call him "scab". Class solidarity is equally noticeable among the peasantry.

Economically illiterate, the majority of the Irish workers believed that the war against the British in 1920-1921 would, by bringing self-government, bring about a kind of Utopia here. The still-potent organisation of unskilled workers, Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, reached its highest level in numbers and influence at that period, but the political side of the labor movement, became of real importance under Connolly prior to his execution in 1916, was swamped in political nationalism.

That political and industrial labor organization received a setback from which it is still recovering was due to the disillusionment which spread to all departments of life in Ireland, but very specially to the Pontius Pilate role which the Irish Labor Party leadership adopted from the beginning of that crisis when they might instead have assumed leadership of a genuine revolutionary movement.

Today the labor union movement is definitely on the upgrade and is likely to learn from experience what it has failed to learn from textbooks. The same cannot be said of the Irish Labor Party which continues to play an opportunist, cowardly, vacillating and evasive role, though, and this cannot be too strongly emphasized, it contains very good elements in the shape of Connolly veterans, clear-headed young folk and I.R.A. who have had their viewpoint widened by experience. The Dublin branches in particular contain a number of sincere, intelligent and hard-working socialists who are trying to get past their leaders a message to the masses which is Marxist in essence, and in bright contrast to the collaboration with the so-called democratic governments preached by the Communist party of Ireland.

The record which earns condemnation for the Labor Party leadership is this. In 1922, instead of giving a revolutionary lead, it vocally condemned both parties to the Civil War on quite arguable premises but gave material support to the pro-imperialist side. Today that leadership is vocally as violently nationalist as the I.R.A. itself but has not regained the confidence of the nationalist masses. It shrieks to the high heavens in protest at fascist aggression in Austria, Czechoslovakia and China, but it remained silent while fascism crushed the Spanish workers. It piously condemns the bureaucracy of the U.S.S.R. but ignores that of the U.S.A.

Only last month, to secure the support of the petty-bourgeois elementary teachers' union it agreed to discard the first plank in its own platform and the very slogan on which James Connolly based the Irish labor political movement—that its aim is the establishment of an Irish Workers' Republic — Dublin, June 6, 1939

Timeline

- 1916, April: Easter Rising in Dublin
- 1918, December: Westminster general election in which Sinn Fein wins a majority of the seats in Ireland. Its MPs refuse to go to Westminster, and instead form a separate Irish Parliament. Declaration of independence.
- 1919-21: Irish war of independence
- 1921-2: Treaty between London and Dublin ends the war on the basis of restricted independence for the southern 26 counties of Ireland, and the six north-eastern counties remaining with Britain with some home rule; 1922-3: Civil war in the 26 counties over the terms of the Treaty
- 1932: Fianna Fail, formed by a large contingent of the anti-Treaty forces from the civil war going into parliamentary politics, wins government. Over the next six years it gradually transforms the restricted independence of the 1921-2 Treaty into de facto full independence
- 1938: Dismantling by agreement of the last three British naval bases in Ireland
- 1939: IRA ultimatum to Britain and declaration of war
- 1949: A coalition government in Dublin formally declares the 26 counties an independent Republic of Ireland. Both government and opposition in Dublin launch a big international campaign to denounce the partition of Ireland
- 1956, December, to 1962: The IRA runs a "Border Campaign" of raids from the 26 counties into N Ireland
- 1965: Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement. The Dublin government is unwinding the protectionist policies it has followed since the 1930s
- 1966: Ian Paisley and others organise militant sectarian Protestant groups in Northern Ireland to resist moves to rapprochement between London, Dublin, and Belfast
- 1967: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association formed, and steps up a campaign for civil rights for Catholics in Northern Ireland
- 1968, October: Violent attacks by Northern Ireland's Protestant-dominated police force on a civil rights demonstration make Northern Ireland's civil rights movement an international issue
- 1969, August: Increasing polarisation between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, generated by continuing civil rights militancy and a Protestant backlash, brings Northern Ireland to the brink of civil war. British troops are sent onto the streets to hold the ring. They soon take down the barricades which Catholic areas have erected in self-defence
- 1971, August: Sweeping measures of internment without trial in Northern Ireland, almost all of Catholics. The Provisional IRA steps up a military campaign
- 1972, March: British government dissolves the Belfast parliament and takes Northern Ireland under direct rule
- 1973, January: Britain and the 26 counties join the European Union
- 1974: A power-sharing government is briefly instituted in Belfast, but soon collapses under the pressure of a Protestant general strike
- 1975: Constitutional convention for Northern Ireland set up by Westminster government; fails to agree on conclusions
- 1981: Ten Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland starve themselves to death in hunger strikes for political status. Boosted by a surge of political support from the hunger strikes, Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Provisional IRA, begins its turn to electoral politics
- 1985: Anglo-Irish Agreement formalises Dublin-London consultation on Northern Ireland affairs
- 1994, August: Provisional IRA declares a ceasefire, later suspended, but then made definite from July 1997
- 1998, April: Good Friday Agreement. This again provides for power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, with a complex system of checks and balances
- 1998, July: First power-sharing government in Northern Ireland under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Power-sharing government is suspended from 2002, but restarts from 2007 with a coalition administration of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein.
- 2007, July: British troops withdraw from the streets in Northern Ireland.