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# The Test of Ireland

By Gerry Foley

## The British Section Follows the Line of the Ninth Congress

The crisis of British imperialist rule in Ireland developing over the past four years has represented a decisive challenge to the British section of the Fourth International. Specifically, it has posed three urgent tasks for British revolutionists: (1) building a mass movement to defend the Irish fighters against imperialist repression; (2) politically assisting the Irish resistance organizations; (3) aiding in the development of an Irish section of the Fourth International that could apply and propagate the tenets of revolutionary Marxism in Ireland. Today it is glaringly evident that the British section of the Fourth International has failed to accomplish any of these three tasks. Moreover—what is still graver—the responsibility for this failure does not lie with the leadership of the British section alone.

The line of the IMG leadership toward the Irish crisis and the tasks flowing from it has clearly followed the logic of the adaptation to ultraleftism by the majority at the Ninth World Congress. Furthermore, the ultraleft tendency of the IMG on this question has been fostered and hardened by the factionalism of the Ninth Congress majority in its defense of the guerrilla warfare orientation and in its method of justifying adapting to ultraleft moods in the youth radicalization.

This process is exemplified by the fact that the IMG line on Ireland has been carried over into the press of the European sections, led by supporters of the Ninth World Congress guerrilla line, without any discussion in the official leadership bodies of the International. The experience and positions of those sections in North America and Oceania that oppose the guerrilla warfare line have been ignored by the European sections despite the impact of the revolutionary process in Ireland upon the immigrant communities across the ocean. Most of the material support for the guerrilla campaign so enthusiastically acclaimed by the supporters of the IEC majority comes from the United States and Canada. Even the attacks of the American government on alleged suppliers of the guerrilla campaign in Ireland have been passed over in silence by the press of the sections in Europe. Nothing has been printed by any organ of the European sections and groups that would indicate that the struggle in Ireland was not an exclusively "European" affair or that any section of the Fourth International other than the IMG had the opportunity of working directly with the Irish national liberation movement.

Thus, the leaderships that supported the adaptation to guerrillaism in Latin America have automatically extended the logic of this position to Ireland, developing an increasingly proterrorist line and apparently feeling justified in disregarding the views of the Trotskyists that

opposed the Ninth World Congress turn. In short, guerrillaism became so central to their conception of revolutionary strategy, such a principled question, that in the case of Ireland conclusions were drawn automatically and no need was felt to even discuss them with those comrades who rejected the guerrilla strategy.

Very quickly the adaptation to ultraleftism reflected in the Ninth World Congress resolution on Latin America came to permeate all the work of the majority on the Irish question, especially the section most directly involved. Before the Ninth World Congress, the IMG succeeded in organizing a demonstration of 100,000 persons against the war in Vietnam, against a war in which Britain had no direct part, by building a broad united front and developing a mass orientation in opposition to every organized tendency on the British left. The demonstration, in fact, helped to encourage the mass civil-rights demonstrations that initiated the revolutionary upsurge in Ireland.

But after adopting the "vanguardist" orientation of the Ninth World Congress majority, the IMG found itself unable to contribute to building a mass movement against the imperialist repression carried out by its own government against a people only a few miles from Britain who were officially citizens of the United Kingdom and had over a million relatives in the key centers of British industry. The IMG shifted to romantic and ultraleft slo-ganizing, trying to outdo all the other groups in the left in this. It found itself in splendid isolation as a result, not only in opposition to the other left groupings but also to the Irish organizations and to the dynamic of the mass anti-imperialist movement.

## How the IMG Changed From a Mass Orientation to Vanguardism

The past five years of the IMG's work on the Irish question in Britain has three phases. The first was a transitional one from the mass orientation of 1968 to the vanguardist notions of the Ninth World Congress majority. In the initial period, the IMG press continued to put the emphasis on the need for a "mass" solidarity movement. Thus, the April 15, 1970, issue of *The Red Mole* declared, under the heading "Our Tasks":

"The task for revolutionaries in Britain is to oppose British imperialism, to demand that the troops be withdrawn and to demand self-determination for Ireland. As revolutionaries in an imperialist oppressor country we should at all times remember that we can offer solidarity to the Irish but that we are dealing with an oppressed nation which has to find its own liberation.

"Only by the most principled internationalism can we be of assistance to our Irish comrades. The record of some sections of the English left has been a poor one so far as the failure to construct a mass-based solidarity

movement demonstrates."

Under the heading "What Is To Be Done in Britain," the July 1970 *Red Mole* broadsheet No. 3 declared:

"We in Britain who support this struggle against British imperialism must not fail. There must be an all-out effort to build an effective solidarity movement on an all-inclusive basis, on the principle of self-determination for Ireland. The great reserves of Irish workers in Britain are ready to be mobilised in such a campaign. And in mobilising them we will begin to mobilise their British fellow workers, not to speak of the Black Workers. In carrying out our revolutionary duty to the Irish comrades we are at the same time preparing for the war against British imperialism in Ireland to be brought home to be fought in the lair of the beast itself.

"Self-determination for Ireland!

"Withdraw all British Troops now!

"Release Bernadette Devlin and all Irish political prisoners now!"

In the August 1970 *Red Mole*, Bob Purdie wrote:

"Last year confusion about the real role of the Troops was rife on the British left. The situation today confirms the position of those who said that they had gone in to get the barricades down and to smash dual power in Derry and Belfast and that any temporary help/protection they gave to the Catholics against an Orange pogrom was with this in mind. Today there can be no confusion about their role, but the crime of the British left is inaction. The crisis in Northern Ireland deepens every day, and every day brings closer the inevitable confrontation between British Imperialism, and the forces of National Liberation in Ireland. What is needed now is to build a mass solidarity movement to aid that struggle."

The change from this correct orientation to an overt vanguardist approach seems to have been completed over the winter of 1970-71. In an article in the April 7, 1971, issue of *The Red Mole*, Comrade Purdie added a third slogan for the solidarity movement: "Support the Armed Action of the Irish People."

Why was this necessary? Why were the slogans of "Self-determination for the Irish People" and "Withdraw British Troops" no longer sufficient in Britain? Didn't they both place the blame for the violence in Ireland squarely on the British forces and didn't they support the right of the Irish people to employ any means to solve their own problems? Didn't they do this in terms that were understandable to the largest possible number of people in Britain? Didn't the adding of the demand for explicit support for "armed action" ask the British people to support a specific tactic in Ireland and, by extension, support the groups utilizing such a tactic? Didn't it therefore demand that the British left intervene in the struggle in Ireland in support of a certain tactic and a certain group? The whole history of the IMG's solidarity work indicates that this was exactly the effect of this policy.

This approach was sectarian within the context of Britain, and by discriminating increasingly among the forces fighting British imperialism—and discriminating not even on the basis of political criteria but on the basis of a tactic elevated to the position of a strategy, if not a principle, it tended more and more to break with the principled support of self-determination expressed in earlier statements. This development went hand in hand

with a shift in the conception of the role of the solidarity movement.

For example, in an article in the September 1, 1971, *Red Mole*, Pat Jordan wrote: "Criticisms related to the tactics of the Irish militants must be expressed in a fraternal manner and largely confined to analytical material designed to influence their thinking. To be concrete: should a section of the IRA decide to indulge in an urban guerrilla campaign in selected parts of Britain, the thrust of the argumentation should be to explain why they have been forced along this road. We should not hesitate to express our support for their right to use these methods and we should oppose the hypocrisy of those who are 'shocked' by this development (explaining very clearly the implicit racialism inherent in this 'shock'). When we express our doubts about such a tactic, it should be on the basis that we do not think it is the best method to defeat British imperialism (in general, urban guerrilla warfare should only be waged where the mass of the local population at least acquiesce in its use).

"Any other course is to weaken and confuse our solidarity with the Irish people in their struggle against the British ruling class. But it is not just a question of duty—our task is to build a revolutionary cadre force in Britain. This means building a body of opinion which is prepared to use revolutionary violence in Britain to overthrow the British ruling class. It goes without saying that it is not conceivable that we can create a force which is prepared for revolutionary struggle in Britain if it is not prepared to support the armed struggle of others against that same ruling class."

Although the emphasis is still on defending the right of self-determination of the Irish, the thrust is subtly shifting toward a conception of using the example of the Irish struggle to build a "revolutionary cadre" in Britain by demanding support for the tactic of "armed struggle," that is, urban guerrilla warfare, which is moreover separated from any political context. The example of "armed struggle" in Ireland is supposed to equip a "revolutionary cadre" in Britain to face armed action when the opportunity arises, presumably as the result of its exhilarating moral effect. Comrade Jordan does not say that by building a successful mass movement to force withdrawal of British troops, the British left can educate the workers in a revolutionary perspective, accentuate the contradictions in British society, and train revolutionists in the techniques of organizing the masses so that they can lead the class struggle to the stage of challenging the capitalist order. He says that by fully identifying with the "armed struggle" in Ireland a "revolutionary cadre" will steel its nerve sufficiently to initiate "armed struggle" in its own country.

The implications of this essentially moralistic notion of the role of armed struggle, as well as the sectarianism and ultraleftism that flowed from separating out armed action in the abstract from the overall struggle and exalting it as a principle became all too evident in the following months.

In *The Red Mole's* articles on the question of building a solidarity movement, the emphasis shifted from the need for an effective mass movement in defense of the Irish people to a certain conception of a need to sacrifice breadth for "principle." As an editorial in the October 5, 1971, *Red Mole* put it:

"If the Irish struggle is to succeed, the British left must fulfil its revolutionary duty. This means a struggle to construct a mass movement in Britain, essentially of British militants, in *meaningful* solidarity with the Irish struggle. [Emphasis in the original.]

"In the test of the last three years, only the International Marxist Group and *The Red Mole* have put forward a programme which corresponds with this. All other tendencies have, alas, been found wanting."

This tone of sectarian boasting and exclusivism is quite familiar on the British left. In particular, it brings to mind the following statement: "Only the Socialist Labour League and the International Committee opposed direct rule from a class standpoint. . . ."

"Only the International Committee and its sections came out unequivocally against the intervention of British troops in Ireland from the very first minute. Against every other tendency we asserted that this was a basic question of principle." (*Workers Press*, June 28, 1972.)

In the October 16, 1970, issue of *The Red Mole*, an article by Dave Kendall had also put "principle" in the forefront.

"The task in Britain is to build an effective solidarity movement. To this end, revolutionary militants must fight for the adoption of principled positions toward the Irish struggle by the British Left which has a lamentable record on this score. The Irish Solidarity Campaign (ISC) must be an important step toward this end and every revolutionary organisation should offer its active support."

The program of the ISC printed in the same issue included three slogans, however, that overstepped the demand for self-determination:

"—Opposition to those fostering religious sectarianism in Ireland and preventing working class unity.

"—Support of the right of Irish workers to arm and organise in self-defence of their homes from attack by sectarian gangs, the military and police.

"—Support for popular movements, North and South, fighting political and economic domination by British imperialism."

As a whole, the program of the ISC seemed to represent a compromise between ultraleftists of an economic bent who demanded that the British solidarity movement support only those forces that were fighting capitalism as such and ultraleftists of a more guerrillaist inclination who insisted that "armed struggle" was "the key." An organization built on such a basis could not but be both sectarian and unstable. The axis of debate had been shifted from defending the right of self-determination to defending specific political tendencies in Ireland. Likewise, discussions of principle became divorced from the question of how to build the broadest and most powerful movement.

### **From the United Front to a New Brand of Sectarianism**

As a result of its sectarian character, the ISC became a sectarian battleground, and when the IMG was left in possession of the name, it found that it had captured itself and isolated itself from the mainstream of the solidarity movement. From the sterile ground of the abandoned ISC, the IMG sought to oppose the mass movement that arose in spite of its policy and to a large extent in spite of the conscious policy of all the British left groups.

When the first mass demonstration developed in support of Irish self-determination, *The Red Mole's* comment in its November 15, 1971, issue was as follows:

"The October 31st demonstration was an important step forward in the building of a campaign in this country in support of the Irish struggle. It showed by its size (at least 20,000) that there is now a basis for a mass campaign on this issue. And more importantly, it also showed (for instance, in the slogans taken up on the demonstration) that there is wide support for a campaign with an explicit solidarity position, i.e. one which goes beyond the two demands of the Anti-Internment League (end internment, withdraw the troops) to a position of solidarity with those forces who are leading the struggle against British imperialism.

"Why is this last point so important? It is important because only by taking a position of unconditional solidarity with those forces which are leading the masses in the struggle to defeat British imperialism—i.e. the IRA—can we demonstrate quite unequivocally that we ourselves are for the defeat of our own ruling class. Many genuine revolutionaries believe that the demand for the immediate withdrawal of British troops is adequate for this purpose, and indeed it is essential to include this demand in the platform of any campaign. But this demand on its own is unfortunately ambiguous: it can very easily be taken up and transformed into a 'Bring the boys home' campaign based on liberal issues with only a negative impact. Such a campaign avoids the issues of the class struggle, can exist completely independently of them, and in its worst form can even divert resources from that struggle. A solidarity campaign is necessary because only on this basis can a campaign on Ireland become an integral part of the class struggle in this country, and only by becoming an integral part of the class struggle in this country can it actually have any effect. Only by posing the question of solidarity with those struggling for the defeat of British Imperialism, and pointing out that such a defeat for the British ruling class would be a positive victory for the labour movement, can we hope to mobilize sections of the liberal movement on a basis which would change the relationship of class forces in this country. Only in this way can we demonstrate that working class internationalism is not a matter of sentiment but a concrete necessity in the fight against imperialism. As we call for victory to the NLF rather than for peace in Vietnam, because we are for the actual defeat of imperialism in Vietnam, so it is necessary at the present conjuncture, when the military struggle between the IRA and the British Army is of decisive importance in the North of Ireland, that we come out openly for victory to the IRA. At the present stage of the struggle this is a logical and necessary development flowing out of the slogans, particularly that of national self-determination, on which we have consistently campaigned. We would argue, therefore, that it is necessary to transform the present campaign against internment and for the withdrawal of British troops into a campaign which is in active solidarity with those leading the fight against British imperialism. We believe not only that it is necessary to take up this position, but that the October 31st demonstration showed very clearly the possibility of building a mass campaign on this basis. The IMG and the Spartacus League will continue to work in and

support the Anti-Internment League, but with the perspective of winning it to a solidarity position. And in the meantime, we shall also continue to support and build the Irish Solidarity Campaign, as part of the process of building a national campaign in solidarity with those leading the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland, the IRA."

In this statement, the vanguardist orientation of the IMG reached full flower. In the context of Britain, where it was essential to build an effective mass movement in support of the right of the Irish people to self-determination, the sectarian and ultraleft character of this position was absolutely clear. The IMG rejected the perspective of a mass campaign for withdrawal of troops. Why? Because it would necessarily be based on "liberal" issues; that is, the masses demonstrating for withdrawal of troops, for preventing the imperialist government from using its principal instrument of coercion and repression, would not necessarily start off being for revolution in Britain. "A solidarity campaign is necessary because only on this basis can a campaign on Ireland become an integral part of the class struggle in this country, and only by becoming an integral part of the class struggle in this country can it actually have effect."

The IMG's position was ultimatic because it denied the masses the opportunity to learn through experience and demanded that they enter into action only on the basis of explicit support for revolution. It was verbalistic because it held that by raising more "revolutionary slogans" the solidarity movement would have a more powerful effect, and it ignored the effect that a mass movement able to appeal to broad layers of the masses and exacerbate the contradictions of British society could have in staying the hand of imperialism and opening up a crisis of its mechanisms of control.

Like most ultraleft sectarian conceptions, this vanguardist approach of the IMG was essentially opportunistic and parasitic. The IMG did not seek to mobilize masses of people in its own country against its own government in support of the Irish people's right to self-determination. It sought instead to identify itself with the fighters in Ireland more closely than any other force, to feed off their prestige in the circles of youth impatient for a revolutionary example. It said in effect: "We are the only ones who have the guts to say here in Britain everything that the fighters in Ireland are saying (and eventually do everything that they are doing); we represent the same thing here in Britain that they do in Ireland and therefore we must be taken seriously."

### **Forming a Revolutionary Pole of Attraction—Sectarianism in a New Costume**

It is hardly surprising that the organizations actually fighting in Ireland found the attitude of the IMG at best a dubious compliment. The guerrillas whose positions were supported uncritically by the IMG might find such political defense useful at times, especially in their disputes with advocates of other tactics, but it was clear that the vicarious revolutionism of their imitators in Britain did not offer much help in the struggle against their principal opponent, British imperialism.

This contradiction seems to explain the following piteous

lament by a member of the Manchester ISC published in the March 13, 1972, issue of the *Red Mole*:

"I read with great interest the letter from the Lancaster comrades which appeared in *The Red Mole* 37, and I took particular interest in the part which I. S. played in the expulsion of the I. S. C. from the Irish 'Solidarity Alliance' on account of the principled stand which the I. S. C. took in regard to the slogan 'Victory to the I. R. A.'

"Up until 4 weeks ago, the Manchester branch of the I. S. C. of which I am a member consisted of the International Marxist Group, Workers Fight, I. S., Revolutionary Workers Party, Clann na hEireann [the British support group of the Official IRA], and about fifteen individual members, e.g. Irish nurses, building labourers, etc. From the formation of this branch, Clann na hEireann had been opposed to the slogan 'Victory to the I. R. A.' and four weeks ago they pulled out of the I. S. C. and after talks with the Provisional Sinn Fein decided to set up an Anti-Internment League."

This blow was made even more bitter by the fact that "unity" had apparently been achieved in a nice trade-off whereby the I. S. accepted the slogan of "Victory to the IRA" in return for the IMG accepting its slogan of support for the "socialist forces" in Ireland.

"Until this point, things had been going well with the branch and its members had been carrying out various activities such as pickets, leafletting and holding public meetings. A compromise had also been reached with I. S. whereby they accepted the slogan 'Victory to the I. R. A.' provided the other groups accepted the slogan 'For a 32-County Workers Republic' and this was agreed on."

In the same issue, Bob Purdie complained bitterly about the ISC in Glasgow being left in the lurch by IS and Clann na hEireann after an October 16, 1971, demonstration that had resulted in a number of arrests and fines. After leaving the ISC, Purdie explained, IS refused even to attend a unity meeting, giving this "tragic" reply to the IMG's invitation:

"IS comrades will not be attending your meeting tomorrow night for the following reasons:

"1. It is being convened under the auspices of an organization which does not have an existence independent of the IMG.

"2. For real united front action the forces coming together must discuss directly and honestly the platform and perspectives of such work. By deciding to issue your invitation under the auspices of the non-existent ISC you indicate that your organisation has already decided on the promotion of a particularly sectarian kind of united front in which we decline to participate.

"3. We are already working closely with members of other organisations and uncommitted comrades around the slogans 'End Internment' and 'Withdraw the British Troops', and for the adoption of internees in Glasgow. We believe that your failure to indicate that the IMG now has a new attitude towards united front work means that the work we are now involved in would be jeopardized if we become involved in the kind of sectarian battles that your proposal promises. . . ."

In defending the ISC against the IS's attack, Comrade Purdie pointed to an IS internal document indicating that this sectarian opportunistic organization had no great interest in forming a broad support movement. But at



the same time, one point in the internal document tried to justify this sectarian attitude by pointing to an ever greater sectarianism on the part of the IMG.

"4. The principal problem with a mass campaign in Britain is not the need for it, nor its potential support, but the existence of the IMG ready and willing to sacrifice it on the altar of sectarianism. Thus the only basis for a national campaign free from those dangers is a front organization of ourselves and close collaborators."

How well was Comrade Purdie able to counter this attempt to shift the blame for failure to develop a broad solidarity movement onto the IMG? The polemic that followed this article indicates that he had some difficulties. In the first place, it drew a bitter attack from Clann na hEireann in a letter published in the May 1, 1972, *Red Mole*:

"It is Clann's Policy not to countenance the sectarian demands of the I.M.G. but to work closely with those individuals and organisations who are genuinely interested in building a mass movement in support of the Irish struggle."

The Glasgow area leader of the IS also responded quite sharply in a letter in the same issue:

"We've been working on our own or jointly with Clann since January partly because, as our achievements show, we are actually strong enough to do so. But more crucially, because of deep political differences we have with the IMG on the character and orientation of solidarity work in Glasgow.

"Two pages before his attack on us in *The Red Mole*, Bob [Purdie] pledges the IMG to 'renew our attempts to build a principled solidarity movement in Britain.' And he then defines a 'principled' movement as one that 'does not hesitate to say: Victory to the IRA.'

"Now as your readers will be well aware, IS's full programme on Ireland 'Unconditional but critical support for the IRA', 'For a 32-County Socialist Workers' Republic', and 'For the Building of an Irish working-class Revolutionary Party'. But in order to bring into activity on a proper united front basis as many people as possible we are willing to work around slogans that contain less than our maximum demands.

"Thus, both IS and Clann in Glasgow prefer to build what Bob would probably describe as an 'unprincipled' movement around the minimum programme of demands to 'End Internment' and 'Withdraw the Troops.'"

The IS organizer was also able to make an apparently rather telling point about the October 16 demonstration in Glasgow: "And IS feels that the wearing of berets and combat jackets, and the 'principled' unfurling of the Tricolour [the flag of the 26-County state] by the IMG on the October demonstration does bear out my statement in a local discussion document quoted by Bob, that the IMG are 'ready and willing to sacrifice it (the potential of a mass campaign in Britain) on the altar of sectarianism'."

Comrade Purdie admitted that IMGers masquerading as IRA combatants was a "tactical error" at least in a city like Glasgow where there is a big Orange element:

"It is true that IMG members carried a tricolour and wore berets on the October 16th demo. In the context of an Orange counter-demonstration this was a serious tactical mistake. It was not a breach of principle since

we have always operated on the basis that individual organisations carry their own banners and slogans on united front demonstrations; IS, for example, carried a banner 'For a Socialist Workers Republic', which was not an agreed slogan. However, this cannot be a barrier to unity, since IS co-operated with us twice after this demonstration, and on neither occasion did we repeat our mistake."

In Glasgow, the symbols of Orange and Green are taken seriously. Mass mayhem, for instance, is a standard part of the program in the traditional football games between the Irish Catholic and Protestant teams. In the endemic violence of this decaying and demoralized industrial city the old rivalries between Irish nationalists and loyalists have retained their brutality while losing most of their political content. So, the IMG's "tactical" error was obvious. Their sectarian demonstration was met by an even larger Orange one, equipped with razors, knives, and even meat cleavers. What is more, the sectarian and exotic character of the demonstration was so salient that the police felt no compulsion to prevent bloodshed and effectively forced the dispersion of the demonstration by knocking off for tea and leaving the make-believe "IRA" cheek to jowl with the real Orangemen. The result was a deep demoralization that long inhibited the left in Glasgow from organizing any open demonstrations in support of the right of the Irish people to self-determination. It does not seem, moreover, that it was very difficult for the IS to ridicule the IMG's concept of a "principled solidarity movement."

Comrade Purdie was left with rather weak arguments. Although participants in a mass march would certainly have had a right to wear IRA uniforms if they so desired, an organization whose members took this way of expressing their "principled demand of victory to the IRA" did not seem to have a very effective program for building a mass movement. There is, moreover, no principle that I know of that forbids revolutionists to wear IRA uniforms, and so this "error" must be described in a general way as a "tactical one." But it did appear to arise from a profoundly erroneous approach and method—an approach that instead of trying to get masses of people to oppose British intervention in Ireland on grounds that they could understand, that is, the right of every nation to determine its own affairs, tried to get revolutionists in Britain to identify with the group and the tactic that the IMG considered most exemplary in Ireland. IMGers actually posing as members of the IRA was all too logically the inevitable outcome of this tendency.

In this context, Comrade Purdie's argument that the line of "Victory to the IRA" was the most effective line on which to build a mass movement in defense of Irish self-determination seemed quite strained and unreal.

"It is true that IMG considers that a principled programme for a solidarity movement would include 'Victory to the IRA' or some other formulation which unambiguously supports IRA action against British imperialism in Ireland, and which is for the defeat of the British Army. We totally reject comrade Jefferys' conceptions about 'Maximum' and 'minimum' programmes, all of our work, and all of our demands are designed to win support for the right of the Irish people to self-determination, which we regard as being the proper principled stance for revolutionaries in Britain. Our demands are designed

to concretise the question of self-determination, i.e. we demand that British troops be withdrawn, and internment be ended because we reject the right of British imperialism to intervene in Ireland, and it is this concept that we try to communicate in our political work. Both of these demands can only be temporary, and related to the immediate situation, for if internment were ended, and the troops withdrawn, the need for solidarity need not necessarily be any the less. The Irish people could be oppressed in just as cruel, if different ways. Because of the need to relate slogans to the changing situation, after internment we adopted the slogan of 'Victory to the IRA'. This was intended to relate to the fact that a major part of the struggle in Ireland was the armed struggle against the British army carried out by the IRA. A solidarity movement which ignores such a major aspect of the struggle can hardly adequately support the Irish people. And it cannot tackle the problem which press propaganda about the IRA constitutes without an unambiguous position of explaining why armed struggle is necessary. In other words we concretise the demand for self-determination by taking a position on the armed struggle."

Why was it necessary "to take a position on the armed struggle"? Didn't the slogan of self-determination for the Irish, including the right to determine their own tactics and means of handling foreign troops who had no right in Ireland answer all the arguments the British might raise against "the armed struggle"? Didn't the demand that the British solidarity movement defend politically all acts of armed violence in Ireland make the task of calling for Irish self-determination much more difficult? Didn't it in fact compromise the demand for self-determination by supporting a certain tactic in Ireland and therefore eventually the specific group or groups that advocated this tactic? Of course it did. This was the conscious intention of the IMG and was spelled out in its November 15, 1971, statement. A campaign on the demand for British withdrawal alone "avoids the issues of the class struggle, can exist completely independently of them, and in its worst form can even divert resources from that struggle."

That is, a broad campaign was seen as in contradiction to the need of building the revolutionary organization. Mobilizing the masses to demand the withdrawal of British troops would detract from the "class struggle" in Britain. The purpose of "solidarity" was to educate a "revolutionary cadre" in the IMG's conception of "armed struggle" which it considered exemplified by the actions of the guerrilla groups in Ireland. The conception of the British section of the Fourth International was clearly sectarian, concerned more with differentiating the "real revolutionists" through a verbally extreme position than with effective work to defend the right of self-determination. The method of the IMG was the same in essence as that of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), except that instead of "working class unity" and a "general strike," the shibboleth was "armed struggle."

### **The Acrobatics of Left Opportunism**

Furthermore, like the Healyites, the IMG did not have the courage of its sectarian convictions. While insisting on maintaining its own sectarian front group, it pleaded that it had no intention of interfering with "unity in action."

Comrade Purdie wrote in the May 1, 1972, *Red Mole*:

"But IS and Clann intend to form an AIL in Glasgow. Good. We will support it; we have no intention of counterposing our Irish work to any attempt to achieve unity in action. Since Steve has issued an invitation to *The Red Mole* readers to work for the AIL demands I hereby apply on behalf of the Glasgow IMG. When do we start Steve? When can we affiliate?"

"At the same time we have no intention of withdrawing from our work to build a movement on a principled solidarity basis, and while we will not advocate that its activities cut across those of the AIL, we will continue to support and build the ISC. We will also make our opinions on the question of a programme clear within the AIL, while avoiding doing so in a way which would aggravate the present strained relations between ourselves and IS."

If the AIL was not based on a "principled solidarity basis," how could the IMG participate in it? On the other hand, if it was possible for a revolutionary organization to participate in a principled way in this much larger organization, in fact, the real united-front organization on the Irish question, why did the IMG need the ISC? The only possible explanation was that it knew that it could not lead a broad movement on the basis of its "victory to the IRA" line but wanted to be in a position where it could parasitize off the broad movement, building a periphery through a deliberately exclusive organization, the type of organization exemplified by the "revolutionary contingents" built by the ultraleft groups in the big antiwar marches in the United States.

But then in the fall of 1972, the IMG succeeded in taking the leadership of the AIL, winning it to a "solidarity" position. It took such firm leadership in fact that Comrade Purdie himself took the job of national organizer. The former organizer, it was explained by Comrade Lawless in *The Red Mole*, had lost interest in the position, the organization no longer being able to pay him a salary. About the same time, the ISC voted to merge with the AIL, which had gone into a deep decline following the downturn in the struggle in Ireland that began with the introduction of direct rule in the spring of 1972. Did the assumption of the main responsibility for the anti-imperialist movement mean that the IMG had decided to take the lead in building a broad movement? Did it mean that it could build such a movement on the basis of its line of "Victory to the IRA"? Alas—to use a favorite interjection of the *Red Mole*—neither seemed to be the case.

Instead the IMG seemed determined to assume the dubious honor of riding a dying horse to its death. Instead of taking up the responsibility for building an effective movement in defense of the Irish people, the IMG seemed rather to be taking the responsibility for giving the coup de grâce to the one reasonably effective anti-imperialist organization, which was being rapidly abandoned by the other sectarian British groups that had always been lukewarm at best about mobilizing masses in support of the Irish right of self-determination. Once again, as in the case of the original ISC, the IMG seemed only to be putting itself in a position where IS could shift the whole blame for sectarian wrecking onto it.

A document submitted to the May 1973 National Committee plenum of the IMG gave the same sort of qualifiedly

optimistic assessment of the AIL that was typical of similar statements about the ISC:

"Since last spring the AIL has been in a state of slow disintegration; the successes we have had, in the November 14th and Bloody Sunday mobilisations have produced slight upturns, but these have been temporary, and have slowed down the rate of decline rather than overcoming it. The cause of the downturn is clear, it is the change in the conjuncture since Direct Rule, which has turned the 'politics of the last atrocity' against us. Seen in this context, the maintenance of the AIL on its present level is a considerable achievement, and one which was only won through a hard political struggle. A struggle which we started *before* the change in the conjuncture, and which, despite tactical errors, enabled us to consolidate a united front, firm enough to stand up in this last period.

"The London bombings and the Police offensive have seriously weakened the AIL. The pressure of 'public opinion', which reached gale force after the bombings, and the grim reality of state repression, have induced a desertion by liberal and reformist elements, and a hiatus in the activity of less politically developed sections, especially in the branches where Irish workers predominate. There is still a core of committed people, and as the situation changes the inactive elements will return; but they are at present mainly engaged outside the AIL in anti-repression work.

"'Against the Stream' noted the strong tendency to pull away from the AIL by Republicans. This was arrested by the success of the two mobilisations, and in the case of the Provos by pressure from Dublin (in the case of Clann the pressure from Dublin was in the opposite direction). The new conjuncture has given these tendencies a strong impetus, Clann, at a recent Ard Coiste (National Cttee) meeting, disaffiliated. At present however there is no sign of IS following suit, and the AIL will continue to receive the support of Clann and SF [Provisional Sinn Fein] members who are committed to the AIL."

As dim as the prospects of the AIL seemed to the IMG leadership in May, 1973, they looked brighter than in the concluding phase of the ISC. A document written in December 1972 and approved by the IMG Irish Commission described the phases of the organization's work as follows:

"1) The mass movement of solidarity with the Civil Rights struggle, of which we were a minor element.

"2) The anti-imperialist solidarity movement, after July 1970, in which we were a leading, though not a dominant element. We were just beginning to pull other forces behind our initiatives, when internment changed the conjuncture.

"3) The mass anti-internment movement, created by the hostility to the injustice of internment, and the brutality of the British Army. In this movement we began as a leading element, but due to the weakness of our day-to-day leadership in the Irish work (MacGovern being in Glasgow and Reed spending long periods in Ireland), we were not able to make a correct tactical intervention, and combine the building of the solidarity movement (ISC) with building the AIL. This led to a brief period of *relative* isolation.

"4) The 'new' AIL, which after Direct Rule, adopted a solidarity programme and in which we are now the leading force."

Perhaps it was this period of "relative" isolation Comrade

Purdie was speaking about when he said at the conference of the Irish Trotskyists in March that for a whole period the ISC in London consisted of five persons who drank together in the same pub. Consistently optimistic, to be sure, Comrade Purdie stressed that this was better than their drinking in five separate pubs.

### The IMG in an Impasse

Another document submitted to the IMG leadership for discussion, "How to Lead from Behind" by Comrade Sykes, made it clear, moreover, that the "shift of the AIL to a solidarity position" came none too soon for the leaders of the IMG's Irish work.

"Were we correct, after the Anti-internment League had been set up, to maintain the Irish Solidarity Campaign in existence?"

"The answer to this must be NO. It is not enough to say that the IMG-ISC comrades were involved in, intervened in or even played a leading role in the AIL during this period. The point is, we did maintain the ISC as a separate organization, justified this politically, and in so doing seriously miseducated the IMG rank and file who were involved in their local areas on the question of Ireland. Why were we wrong in so doing? Firstly, the IMG allowed its own position on the question of slogans or demands to act as a barrier to achieving the broadest possible unity in opposition to the oppressive role of British imperialism in Ireland. In maintaining the ISC during this period we were being straightforwardly sectarian. In Oxford, for instance, and this was probably typical of quite a number of IMG branches at this time, the IMG was the *only* organized force in the ISC. Not only that but we refused to set up an AIL when other forces were attempting to do so, namely IS, encouraged by John Gray (who came to Oxford twice for this purpose). Our reason for not co-operating was the fact that the AIL would not adopt our slogan on the IRA.

"In other words we refused to work in a united front with other groups who did not accept *our* position.

"Firstly, was it a question of *principle*? Would it have been unprincipled to merge ISC and AIL when AIL was set up? No. The AIL was never an unprincipled alliance. If the AIL had been built around a demand for 'Peace' in Ireland, it would have been an entirely different matter. But quite a few IMG comrades approached this as a principled issue. This error was reinforced by the Red Mole's statement on the merger to the effect that there was no principled political difference which justified maintaining the separate organizations, thereby implying that it was a principled question before that. The argument put forward to explain our tactic towards the AIL was more or less as follows. Here on the one hand, are we, the IMG/ISC, with the correct *programme*. There, on the other hand, are the masses of the AIL that we want to talk to. So what we have to do is to fight to bring the AIL to the solidarity position so that we can join it.

"Now a number of things need to be said. First we were obviously correct to disband ISC and work in the AIL. But we did it *too late* and we gave the *wrong reason* for doing so. If the AIL had not adopted the solidarity position what would we have done? Eventually, I think we would have merged, because of the incorrectness of maintaining the ISC was becoming more obvious to a



lot of comrades, and for the correct reason. But because the AIL did change its programme we were able to merge without having to confront the incorrectness of our past position, a position which we still, at this late stage, completely justify: 'we were correct to have this tactical arrangement as a precaution since at any time the situation in the AIL could have changed, and made it more difficult for us to consolidate our leadership.' (Purdie, 'Against the Stream', 26-12-72). At the November AIL conference there was a motion proposed to the effect that the AIL drop the solidarity slogan. If that had passed would we have walked out? Obviously it would be wrong to do so. I'm sure Cd McGovern would also oppose walking out. But the point is, the line we have taken in the past on the AIL can only miseducate and confuse members as to what would be politically correct in that sort of situation. Most likely we would come up with some kind of manoeuvre which kept us half in and half out."

The same document disposed rather effectively, although in ponderous and obscure paragraphs, of the basic political premises underlying the IMG's Irish work since 1971:

"(3) *Should the Solidarity Movement be based on Revolutionary Defeatist Programme?*

"Having cleared away the wrong sort of argument for engaging in 'programmatic struggle' it is now necessary to confront the real argument. This argument is stated quite clearly in the 1972 Conference Document and again in 'Against the Stream', and it is as follows:

"'The principled revolutionary position of solidarity with the forces struggling against British Imperialism was not separable from the programme necessary to draw wider forces around the revolutionary vanguard and augment its efforts to engage in immediate political action on the Irish question' (AtS 4).

"'The essence of our position is that in order to build a movement based on self determination we must demand that it explicitly support the armed struggle of the IRA against the British Army' (Conference Document p. 15).

"The need, for reasons already explained, is for a broadly based movement among the mass vanguard in Britain which opposes Britain's war in Ireland. In the normal run of affairs, the initial impetus for such a movement will come from the organised vanguard, in other words, from the various political tendencies. It may or may not be the case that the common position shared by the organised vanguard is one of revolutionary defeatism. In any case the task which is then posed is to build the movement, initiated by the organised vanguard, and extend it into the working class and other social layers, to make it quantitatively and qualitatively an effective challenge to the British war effort. Now what the above argument says is that in order to extend the movement outside the ranks of the political tendencies, a programme based on revolutionary defeatism is essential. Therefore it is correct and necessary to struggle for that programme inside the UF [United Front] as a means towards building the broader movement.

"Now, on the face of it, this doesn't at all seem to be obviously correct [Amen!—GF]. It would appear to be a plausible argument to say that, although it would be correct, inside such a broad movement, for revolutionaries to put forward a revolutionary defeatist pro-

gramme, nevertheless the mass vanguard is not a 'revolutionary' vanguard and will not be mobilised by political tendencies on a programme of 'principled revolutionary defeatism'.

"This position, on how to build a broad movement has never been seriously questioned in the IMG. The experience of the VSC [Vietnam Solidarity Campaign] has become a norm. The American experience is regarded as either an exception or as involving some sort of questionable politics. So, without prejudging what is correct, it is necessary to look at the arguments that have been offered so far to back up this position.

"Arg. 1 'Without a clear position of support for those who are carrying on armed struggle against the British Army any mass movement would split in the face of disagreements about particular military tactics, especially since the entire propaganda machine of the British bourgeoisie is striving to create such disagreements.' (Conf. Doct. p. 6).

"Now this argument misses a very important point about united front campaigns, namely, that they are not meant to eliminate political antagonisms. Of course there are going to be disagreements. Among the thousands that demonstrated after the massacre of Derry's Bloody Sunday there must have been a section that demonstrated to protest this particular atrocity but without understanding the need to support the military tactics of the other side. Similarly, growing out of the experience of their own struggle against the British ruling class, an increasing section of the mass vanguard may come to understand that Britain is exploiting Irish workers also and is in fact using her troops to maintain this exploitation. This could lead to their understanding the need for a troops withdrawal from Ireland but, once again without understanding the need to support the Provos in their military campaign. Now what follows from this? Not that we 'dilute our politics' to accommodate to the lowest level. Posing the question in this way gets us off on the wrong foot right from the start. The task of the revolutionary group vis à vis these elements is clearly to advance and explain our own position, namely why it is necessary to support the armed struggle of the IRA. In fact, if the AIL did ever grow into a real mass united front, the political tendencies with a position of revolutionary defeatism would probably be in a minority. To say that the UF would be 'split' over such disagreement can only be based on the confusion that unity of programme is a prerequisite for unity of action. If this were the case then the whole question of the UF could not even be raised.

"Arg. 2 'But the most important reason for having a clear position on this question is that it is on this point that the interests of the Irish and British workers are most highly integrated, precisely because this is the sharpest point of the struggle. We must advance a position of revolutionary defeatism, a defeat for the Army in Ireland would enormously strengthen the British working class and a consciousness of this fact among the British working class would enormously advance their revolutionary potential.' (Conf. Doct. p. 6).

"Of course all this is true, if we were talking about the revolutionary group. Objectively, the interests of Irish & British workers are highly integrated at this point, objectively a defeat for the army would strengthen the

British working class. Subjectively, however, there is a deficiency here, namely that the British working class does not understand this. The UF tactic is precisely an important way of overcoming this to some extent, because, by creating a broadly based unity of action against the war, the conditions are created in which the methods, the propaganda and the leadership of the revolutionary group can be effective in advancing the consciousness of sections of the mass vanguard on precisely such questions as these. This however is not an argument about the programme of the UF, it is an argument about *the task of a revolutionary group inside a UF*, namely the politics it puts across to the mass elements that are drawn to the UF.

"Arg. 3 'Up to now we have rejected the course of building a Troops Out Movement because we knew that a movement built on such a limited political basis could not be a *vehicle for ongoing political action* on the Irish question *during such times as the struggle remains outside the understanding and concern of all but a small section of the vanguard in Britain.*' (Against the Stream, p.4).

"What this argument says is that at a time when only the organized political tendencies can be brought into action on Ireland, the following is true—

"(a) A UF of those tendencies will have stability only if it takes up a position on the IRA.

"(b) Only if it takes a position on the IRA will it be capable of extending its activity to include more and more sections of the unorganized vanguard.

"I doubt very much that either of those is true. Let's take them in order. Firstly, whatever stability the AIL has had, it is just so much idealism to say that this was because of some section of its programme. Let's look at what 'Against the Stream' says about the attitudes of the various tendencies inside the AIL during this period.

"*Clan* some elements were hostile, but they stayed in because it provided them with a local platform and a milieu from which to recruit. *Clan* has since withdrawn from AIL.

"*SF* [Provisional Sinn Fein] Almost pulled out after AIL Conference. Staying in because of pressure from Dublin and change in composition of London Comhairle Ceanntar. Has now also withdrawn.

"*IS* Completely opportunist, they'll work when there's a chance of recruiting. A small section politically committed.

"*IMG* Only *IMG* is completely committed to building the AIL. Despite this shaky arrangement AIL has remained stable. Why? Firstly, because of the ongoing war in Ulster which, despite some conjunctural downturn has remained at a fairly constantly high level and, over a given period of say one year, produces a fair number of 'high points' or mobilizers. Thus in one year we have had the Bloody Sunday Massacre, the campaign to defend the liberated areas, operation Motorman, the Hunger Strike in Belfast jail, Aldershot, the arrest of MacStiofain in the South etc. Secondly the political activity on the issue of Ireland during the past three years has politicized a small but steady section of the organized vanguard."

As for the policy of the leaders of the *IMG*'s Irish work, Sykes pointed out that it remained the same as in the

period of the *ISC*—maintenance of a sectarian position while in fact tail-ending broader movements developing outside its purview.

"The *real problem* posed for the revolutionary vanguard in this country now is *how to broaden the forces in Britain resisting the British war in Ireland*, how to orient to the developing crisis in British society resulting from the Irish war and to adopt the tactics appropriate to this orientation. . . .

"How is this question posed in 'Against the Stream'? It is posed in terms of do we or do we not have a *strategy of building a TOM* [Troops Out Movement]? The answer it gives is no, because this is not a stable basis for a UF and it is not a basis for extending the movement, but if such a movement got under way we would have a *tactical* orientation to it, while maintaining the strategy of building a solidarity movement (i.e. one based on a programme of revolutionary defeatism)." (Emphasis in the original.)

This document is rather unclear on the question of an alternative to the *IMG* leadership's line in Irish work and it does not break fundamentally with the methodology of the *IEC* majority. However, in the context of this discussion, the *IMG* leadership's discovery of a "new conjuncture" becomes more understandable. The perspective was outlined by Comrade Purdie in the January 13, 1973, conference of the *AIL*. This is the way the January 20 *Red Mole* summarized his report: "He outlined the work done over the past few years in building a solidarity movement from the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign to the present *AIL*. The main lesson he drew from this experience was that at certain times (e.g. after internment) it was possible and absolutely necessary to try to build a movement involving the largest possible number of people around simple demands (e.g. 'End Internment'). Nevertheless, it was also necessary at times to fight within that movement for more developed political demands (such as explicit support for the military struggle of the *IRA*). Unless this was done, experience has shown that the movement will crumble with a change in the situation in Ireland (as the introduction of direct rule showed). The central basis of such demands must be the right of the Irish to self-determination.

"He also pointed out the possibilities in the near future for building a movement on the basis of 'Troops Out of Ireland', and said that the *AIL* must be ready to take all opportunities for constructing such a movement."

### How the *IMG* Got so Far Ahead of the Masses That It Ended Up Behind the Social Imperialists

In the February 17, 1973, issue of the *Red Mole* Comrade Lawless argued that the latest British atrocity in the New Lodge Road area had increased the possibility for building a "TOM."

"But the result of their desperate rampage increased the pressure in British society for a withdrawal from Ireland—this pressure is reflected in the Labour Party's careful airing of the demand to 'Bring our Boys Home'. This demand is highlighted by the centrist Eric Heffer who joined Wilson's stalking-horse on this issue, James Well-

beloved, to call for the withdrawal of 'our boys', while at the same time protecting himself against allegations of being an anti-imperialist by referring to the dangers our boys have to face from the 'savages' on both sides.

"However half-hearted this demand, it contains serious dangers for Whitelaw. The shifting of the Tribunitis [Labour party leftists] could easily provoke a movement by Harold Wilson to break bi-partisanship on Ireland and in turn precipitate a stampede in Britain for the withdrawal of troops, leading to the antiwar and solidarity movements of thousands gaining the strength of millions, and even reaching such proportions as to threaten to rend the fabric of British society on this issue.

"Revolutionary socialists involved in rallying aid for the struggle in Ireland must, in the next crucial weeks, be sensitive to these possibilities and prepare now the initiatives to gather and organise this potential." (Emphasis in original.)

Comrade Lawless's article pointed to the May 19 AIL conference on "The British Labour Movement and the British Army in Ireland" that was to concretize the new line. The statement adopted there called for activity along the following lines: "The British working class must support only those solutions which give the Irish people, as a whole, the right to solve Ireland's problems, and deny any further interference by British imperialism. The central demand must be for the immediate withdrawal of British troops, the political prisoners and detainees must be released, and all repressive legislation abolished. Unless the British working class uses its strength to win these demands, the methods now being used in Ireland will be turned against them." (*Red Weekly*, May 25, 1973, emphasis in original.)

In a document by one of the principal leaders of the Irish Commission, entitled "The Central Orientation of Our Irish Work," the aim of the May 19 conference was explained this way:

"The May 19th conference therefore should not be seen as the founding conference of a TOM. It has a limited function of intervening in this conjuncture to show how the struggle in Ireland links up immediately with the problems confronting the British working class, and to win a small number of Trade Unionists to work within the TUs [trade unions] against the repression in Ireland. This would have two effects:—

"1) It would give a more solid base to the resistance against repression in Britain, which is a barrier to the development of political work on the Irish question in Britain.

"2) By developing opposition to the repressive role of the troops it would lay the basis for an effective TOM (i.e. one not susceptible to chauvinist pressure), while rendering valuable immediate aid to the struggle in Ireland. We should therefore have four main propaganda themes at the conference.

"1) The British Army is a repressive force, not a peace-keeping force.

"2) British Imperialism, and the British Army cannot solve the 'Irish Problem', they can only contribute to it.

"3) The only realistic solutions are solutions based on self-determination, i.e., Withdrawal of Troops, release of internees and political prisoners, an end to repressive

legislation, no right of a minority of the population to maintain the partition of Ireland, etc. etc.

"4) The North of Ireland is a laboratory for repressive techniques which will be used in Britain. Resistance to the repression in the North of Ireland is a necessary part of the current struggles of the working class in Britain.

"We should explain why we are in solidarity with the IRA, and the other organisations resisting British Imperialism, but should make it clear that this is not a barrier to our collaboration with others who do not take this position against the repression.

"But although the issue of repression is important, we must resist any tendency to get stuck at the level of an anti-repression campaign. We did not choose to fight on this ground; without a successful challenge to repression we cannot get any further, but our aim must be to get on to the ground of opposition to the British Army. And so far as is possible we should be attempting to direct the forces involved in the anti-repression work towards our central orientation."

Thus, despite bows in the direction of a broader movement, the method of the leaders of the IMG's Irish work has obviously not changed. Their basic orientation remains sectarian and parasitic. Their main objective remains to mark out a "revolutionary circle" within the general movement that their political conceptions cannot promote or focus. This broad current of revulsion against the imperialist repression in Ireland has in fact tended to develop outside the purview of the IMG. While the IMG leaders have failed signally to offer this broad movement a perspective, they have been forced again and again to bow to it, have irresistibly been drawn into its wake. The IMG's turns and the "many-sided" nature of its work are not thus an example of its "flexibility" and the "sophistication" of its tactics but simply an expression of the general law that normally the tail does not wag the dog.

The inevitable result of the IMG's sectarian politics, its contempt for the mass movement, is that it has proved unable to play a leadership role but in fact has been forced to tail-end the masses. In fact, the turn toward a "TOM" seems to represent not simply tail-ending the masses but a deliberate attempt to tail-end the Labour party lefts, or even Wilson himself.

The author of "The Central Orientation of Our Irish Work" gives the following arguments against trying to form a "TOM," such as the backward anti-Vietnam war movement in the U. S.

"1) The difference between a professional and a conscripted Army.

"2) The transformation in the US [United States] of a qualitative build up opposition to the endless slaughter of an Army which had close links with the population, into a qualitative change in the domestic political situation when the Anti-war movement focused its agitation on the issue of immediate withdrawal of troops. Even with a very much greater escalation of British imperialism's commitment to Ireland, the point of transformation of quality into quantity is not likely to be reached before there is a switch in policy away from massive troop commitments.

"3) The existence of a split in the US ruling class, which expressed itself in a fierce debate in the bourgeois political arena."

The author of this document seems to think that the antiwar movement in the United States developed almost automatically (or perhaps spontaneously) and that its victories were handed to it at the start.

What, for example, produced the split in the ruling class? Wasn't it the growing fear that the effects of the war on American society were too costly to justify the expenses needed to continue the war? That is, precisely the existence of forces determined to focus the antiwar sentiment into a powerful mass movement capable of inhibiting the power of American imperialism to make war?

Why did the "youth vanguard" take up the issue of Vietnam? The young radical organizations that existed at the start of U.S. involvement in Indochina showed no great desire to defend the Vietnamese people's right of self-determination. The American Trotskyists had to wage a hard fight to make Vietnam the central issue for the left in the United States and to prevent all sorts of reformists and ultraleftists from diverting the "youth vanguard" to other issues that they thought could be springboards to make the war "an integral part of the class struggle" in the U.S.

Furthermore, the issues at stake in Vietnam did not look at all clear to the "youth vanguard" in the early sixties. It was only a determined campaign on the central question—the right of the Vietnamese people to determine their own future—that clarified the issues in Vietnam.

Most importantly, although the U.S. Army was a conscripted one, antiwar sentiment was only openly expressed within it when a powerful antiwar movement was operating within the society at large. The demoralization and disaffection of the army was the reflection of the political forces at work in civilian society. The author of "The Central Orientation" seems to regard military discipline as a politically autonomous factor. In fact, it is only one element in capitalist ideological hegemony. The ability of capitalist society to convince soldiers, professional or conscript, to face death and injury in its defense depends on general confidence in the policy of the bourgeoisie. A mercenary force like the French Foreign Legion, made up of desperados, outcasts, and lumpen fascistic elements might not be so readily affected by the general political moods of the society. But this is hardly the case with a professional army of the British type, which is made up largely of young workers in need of jobs who were attracted by the advantages offered by the recruiters.

In fact, the British army in Ireland seems to be a fair mirror of British society. Despite the attempts of the officers to keep the ranks in a state of constant tension, there is a whole gamut of attitudes running through various strata from brutalized Glasgow slum toughs to very young and obviously frightened English youths. The fact that wives of soldiers started a "bring the boys home" campaign on their own indicates the possibilities for organizing in the army. The question arises, then, why the IMG leadership was so willing to believe that the youth in the British army were hardened killers and robots of repression. Similar attitudes were present among the ultraleftists and pacifists in the American antiwar movement where they quite clearly reflected petty-bourgeois elitism and contempt for the working class. The Socialist Workers party had

to wage a long hard fight against these tendencies to defend not only its perspective of mass mobilization against the war but its fundamental proletarian orientation.

If the British army has no "close links" with the population, as *The Red Mole* has claimed, how can writers in the same organ (now entitled *Red Weekly*) talk about important sentiment in the Labour party for "getting our boys out"? No matter how they interpret the political implications of such sentiment, its very existence makes nonsense of former "analyses" that presented the army as a mercenary force separated off from political influence by a Chinese wall of "military discipline" and "professionalism." If the esprit de corps and discipline of a "professional" army precludes work among soldiers, how could the petition campaigns of their relatives calling for withdrawal begin and develop as it has? If this military discipline was so formidable, why should the relatively small number of casualties suffered by the British forces in Ireland have led to such an obvious demoralization? Isn't it fundamentally because of the political conviction that the role of the troops was not defensible, that the cause in which they were asked to fight was not worth even a hundred lives in four years?

Why did the IMG have to wait for the development of an actual attempt to organize a withdrawal movement in army circles before it began to pay any attention to this type of activity? Why didn't it raise this perspective from the start?

The only possible answer is that it was blinded by sectarian and elitist political conceptions. Therefore it could not offer a perspective. It could only "reorient" empirically to this vitally important activity once it actually began to develop. That is, it did not lead the mass movement but tail-ended it.

The sentiment for withdrawal is not a new "conjunctural" phenomenon in Britain. In its October 5, 1971, issue *The Red Mole* declared:

"In Britain itself, a recent opinion poll showed that despite the mass hysteria of the British press, despite the treachery of the Social Democracy, despite the virtual desertion of the Irish struggle by a large section of the British Left, 58% of the British population support the recall of the British troops from Ireland. This percentage will grow as more and more British troops return home to the graveyards and mental homes of Britain."

Thus, despite all the IMG leaders' claims about it being qualitatively more difficult to build a mass movement for withdrawal in Britain than it was in the U.S., *two years ago* the percentage of the British population favoring withdrawal was greater than the percentage of such sentiment in the United States until the final phase of the antiwar movement.

Furthermore, there is a curious contradiction between the IMG leaders' arguments about the peculiar difficulties of building a mass withdrawal movement in Britain and their apparent expectation that the Labour party will do them the favor of creating a withdrawal movement for its own political advantage. This expectation is logical, however, in view of the conceptions expressed in the November 15, 1971, *Red Mole* article: "Many genuine revolutionaries believe that the demand for the immediate withdrawal of British troops is adequate for this purpose, and



indeed it is essential to include this demand in the platform of any campaign. But this demand on its own is unfortunately ambiguous: it can very easily be taken up and transformed into a 'Bring the boys home' campaign based on liberal issues with only a negative impact." Since a withdrawal campaign, then, would be essentially "liberal," why not expect the Labour party to build one, which revolutionists could then support as having some "conjunctural" usefulness?

It is likely in fact that elements of the Labour party may support or even initiate protests against British involvement in Ireland if popular pressure is sufficient, possibly to gain a political lever against the Tory hawks or to coopt antiwar sentiment. Even the American Democratic party did that. But to expect the Labour party to conduct a withdrawal campaign in any consistent way would be to believe that the social imperialists themselves are capable of fighting imperialism, of defending the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination.

This is the opportunistic implication of the IMG leaders' sectarian and ultraleft orientation. This concept alone indicates that the Labour reformists will prove incapable of giving impetus to a mass withdrawal movement, even if they empirically readjust their course to accommodate to the mass sentiment for withdrawal. This conception also indicates the real basis of the IMG's objections to building a "bring the boys home movement." They flow from a rejection of the role of democratic demands in the struggle against imperialism, a rejection of the method of the Transitional Program — that is, mobilizing the masses on the basis of their present level of consciousness in a struggle that leads them *objectively* in battles against the decaying capitalist-imperialist system that can no longer satisfy reasonable democratic and immediate economic demands.

### The IMG's Idea of Revolutionary Morality and Ours

But doesn't the IMG deserve some credit for being the only British organization to unconditionally defend the Irish fighters? What about the enthusiastic IMGers who bravely faced fierce hostility to sell their *Red Moles* with headlines that called for victory to the IRA? Haven't they proved their revolutionary mettle? This plea by the IMG leaders and their defenders is not only an expression of petty-bourgeois moralism and an indefensible attempt to feed on the reflected glory of the sacrifices and sufferings of the fighters in Ireland (who face a more serious threat than an occasional punch in the nose); it is not even incompatible with the paternalism and sanctimoniousness of liberal imperialism in Britain. As the author of "How to Lead from Behind" wrote:

"... and for our refusal to capitulate to the chauvinism of the British working class we have praised ourselves sufficiently in the past. But where we have had much more questionable position, and a definitely wrong practice, is on the question of how to intervene in and how to build the 'solidarity movement.'"

That is, the IMG's virtues lie primarily in the sphere of its moral attitudes. No Marxist can accept such an apology. In fact, judged on a materialist basis, the basis of the objective effect and the underlying political implications of their actions, the virtues of the IMG are less than impressive. In trying to strike a pose of offering the most

intransigent support for the Irish fighters, the IMG really developed a sectarian ultimatum position toward the Irish organisations and completely perverted the meaning of "unconditional support."

The Irish revolutionists and their direct representatives could not have made their desires more plain. On the attitude of the Official IRA, the author of "How to Lead from Behind" quotes the leaders of the IMG's Irish work to the effect that they want no part of the AIL but are backward and liberal enough to desire a "TOM." But what about the Provisionals? Since they are dedicated to armed struggle, surely they could be counted on to reject anything so reformist as a "TOM"? But their organ, *An Phoblacht*, has so far obviously been more impressed with the development of groups calling for withdrawal of the troops than the increasingly sectarian actions of the AIL, even though the AIL has tended more and more openly to support the political line of the Provisionals. The Provisionals on the spot almost pulled out of the AIL after the conference where the "solidarity position" was adopted, the author of "How to Lead From Behind" explains.

In short, it was obvious that the IMG had not really maintained what was presented in Comrade Jordan's September 1, 1971, article in *The Red Mole* as the proper attitude for British revolutionists to take toward the liberation fighters in Ireland: "Our first answer to these objections [of the sectarians] is to make it very clear that the major task of British socialists is not to tell the Irish people how to wage their struggle (methinks maybe they would be better placed to tell us how to wage ours), but, on the contrary, it is to end the position where the British working class, and especially the leadership of its organisations, are direct accomplices in the oppression of the Irish people." As the IMG adaptation to ultraleftism deepened, it not only did not hesitate to launch attacks on Irish militants whose forms of action did not fit into its "armed struggle" strategy but arrogantly ignored the desires of all the elements fighting in Ireland for the kind of movement that could give them effective aid.

On the other hand, the author of "How to Lead From Behind" does say that the local Provisionals were restrained from pulling out of the AIL by the Dublin leadership. This raises the question of why the Dublin leaders defended the AIL. Is it because of the organization's effectiveness? But enthusiasm for the AIL seems markedly lacking in the Provisional publications.

What then could be the reason? It is true that the AIL is one of the few organizations that is continuing to do anything on the Irish question. That is to its credit. But it is still obviously declining, and even in this period of general downturn in the movement there are signs that point to its being bypassed. Let us look then at the way the Provisionals conceive of broad support activity. They have an antifrepressive front of their own, the Irish Civil Rights Association (ICRA). They have made few efforts to make this organization genuinely broad. It engages in polemics with the Official IRA, defending the Provisional line. It is small and isolated. Still it obviously has value for them, since they maintain it.

What precisely is its value? It is a "political wing," a legal organization that politically defends the actions of the Provisionals. As such, it represents one of the historic components of the military conspiratorial movement



in Ireland. The question then arises whether the Provisional leadership in fact views the AIL in the same light, as a legal front charged with the tasks of defending them politically. This could explain their support for it despite its obviously decreasing effectiveness. Such a suggestion is extremely grave. But the whole direction of the IMG's Irish work, the essential dilemma in which all their propaganda and activity around the Irish issue is lodged, justifies raising it.

In fact, the IMG leadership finds itself in the worst possible position with regard to the nationalist movement in Ireland. On the one hand, it has proved unable to build an effective defense of the struggle and thus win solid respect in its own right. On the other, it has progressively accommodated to the politics of petty-bourgeois nationalist terrorism and become a left cover for the conservative militarist leadership of the Provisionals. Thus at one and the same time its policy has been sectarian and opportunistic, and as a result of this it has failed in its fundamental duty of offering a perspective for carrying the struggle in Ireland forward to victory, lapsing increasingly into the role of apologist for the backward terrorist conceptions of a fossilized petty-bourgeois nationalist sect.

The courage of the IMG rank and filers who braved hostility to sell their deliberately provocative *Red Moles* could have been put to far better use than to support a bankrupt and fundamentally opportunist policy. If the IMG leadership did not fear to provoke the hostility of people on the streets and in other places where the *Red Mole* was sold, why were they unwilling to confront possible hostility of workers and soldiers in order to explain the need for British withdrawal from Ireland? Surely here a fight would not only have been much more fruitful for the Irish people but would have had a much better chance of victory in the long run. In fact, the conclusion seems inescapable that the IMG preferred a make-believe fight to the real one, and thus, however subjectively courageous individual militants may have been, the organization's claims of revolutionary virtue are essentially hypocritical, that is, do not represent a qualitative advance over the opportunist British left organizations.

Before the irresistible pressures of reality, all the dogmatic pretexts for avoiding the duty of building a mass movement for withdrawal have slowly crumbled and become untenable. But miseducation, reinforced by frenzied factionalism, has gone deep into the leadership and the ranks of the IMG. It seems unlikely that they can reorient themselves sufficiently to build an effective troops out movement without squarely facing their errors and rejecting most of their past three years' theory and practice on the Irish issue. The discovery of a "new conjuncture" is not enough. In fact, one of the realities they may have to confront is that because of the decline in the struggle in Ireland—owing to the political errors of the main organizations involved, errors moreover that the IMG itself approved and encouraged—it is already too late for a bring-the-troops-home movement to decisively aid the struggle of the nationalist ghetto dwellers.

The fact is that the IMG's errors are not an accidental development, nor do their origins lie fundamentally in Britain. This entire evolution is the logical and inevitable result of the opportunistic turn taken by the majority

at the Ninth World Congress in adapting to the pressures of guerrillaism in Latin America. The development of the IMG's sectarian and opportunist line on the Irish question in Britain has gone hand in hand with an adaptation to the terrorism of others in Ireland and the logical and inevitable corollary of this—adaptation to the political conceptions of Blanquism and populism.

### Extension of the Latin American Guerrilla War Line to Europe

As in the development of the IMG's sectarian and ultra-left conceptions of building a support movement for the Irish struggle in Britain, there seem to be three parallel phases in the development of its adaptation to terrorism in Ireland.

In the initial stage, the IMG's Irish experts were attracted to the conceptions of the Official IRA, according to which the armed action of commando groups was to be subordinated to "grass-roots" struggles or assigned a role of "defending" the mass movement. Then the IMG leadership placed its hopes in a small "Marxist" commando group operating in complete isolation from all mass struggles, Saor Eire. It was hoped that by its exemplary actions, this group could spark a radical development in the larger republican organizations. Finally, the IMG leadership fell more and more into the role of apologists and advocates of the apolitical militarism of the Provisionals.

From the beginning, the IMG leadership assigned Marxists an auxiliary role to the big nationalist organizations. As an article in the April 15, 1970, *Red Mole* put it: "The fate of the Irish revolution in the immediate future will depend on the ability of Irish revolutionary groupings to capture the leadership of the republican movement and to indivisibly weld together that movement with the struggle in the North." In the August 1970 issue of the *Red Mole*, Bob Purdie wrote: "In addition the Falls is the stronghold of the 'Red' Republicans, that section of the Republican Movement which has declared for a Workers' Republic. They have won the confidence of the people by assisting them against racketeering landlords, moving them into empty houses and protecting them from eviction. In co-operation with other organizations, they run an advice center, where legal advice can be obtained in addition to help in dealing with the state bureaucracy and physical protection where necessary."

In his assessment of the Official republican convention published in the February 1, 1971, issue of the *Red Mole*, Comrade Purdie wrote: "The walk-out at last years Ard-Fheis by the group now known as the 'Provisionals', although it took out a number of genuine revolutionaries, also sloughed off a backward section of the movement which could not overcome the limitations of the pure physical force tradition of Irish Republicanism."

In an article in the April 7, 1971 *Red Mole*, Comrade Purdie described the differences between the Officials and Provisionals in the following way:

"Following the failure of the 1956-62 campaign the leaders of the IRA spent a long time discussing the reasons for their failure. What was important to them was not their military defeat but that they had failed to get the support of the Irish people. With such support their guerrilla war would have been invincible; without it, de-

spite the widespread sympathy they received, they were powerless against the armed might of British imperialism.

"This long discussion had profound consequences. A large section of the movement began to realise the need for a clear idea of the kind of Ireland worth fighting for, and that the only perspective was to fight for a Workers' Republic. This coincided with a move away from such practices as refusing to recognize courts, or to answer police questions, which had led to militants needlessly going into prison, thus weakening the movement further: to the dropping of the 'abstentionist' policy of refusing to take seats if elected to Westminster, Stormont or the Dail.

"It was the latter point which was the ostensible reason for the split last year between the 'Officials' and the 'Provisionals'. Following the decisions of the Army Council in favour of ending the abstentionist policy, the 1970 Ard Fheis (Conference) of the Republican Movement's political wing, Sinn Fein, supported the abandonment by a small majority (which was not enough to make the necessary change in the constitution). A large number of delegates walked out, setting up the 'Provisional Army Council', and the 'Caretaker Executive of Sinn Fein.'

"The differences were of course more profound than on the question of abstention: the Provisionals also rejected the socialist perspective of the Officials, and accused the Officials not only of having sold out by recognising the 'Treatyite' parliaments, but of being under communist influence.

"But there was another issue, which has been the cause of the real deep bitterness between the two organisations, and that is the role of the Army Council during the August 1969 events in the North. The fact that, when the people of the Bogside and Falls were facing a pogrom by the 'B' Specials and RUC, the Army Council did not send the arms which were available. Cathal Goulding, the Chief of Staff, has explained the reasons for this: they carry a great deal of conviction. However, the fact of the failure of the arms to appear, at a decisive moment, combined with the turn of the Officials away from pure physical force tactics, has enabled the Provisionals to label them as 'pacifist' and accuse them of running down the armed section of the movement. In addition the Provisionals have undoubtedly gone out of their way to prove their own militancy against the British troops. This has tended to obscure the fact that the longest engagement between British troops and Republican forces since the Black and Tan Wars was the 16-hour gun battle carried on by the Official IRA in the Lower Falls last July."

And further on, Comrade Purdie even argued that the British troops were trying to provoke the Officials into unwise armed actions: "It seems fairly certain that the Provisionals can turn out larger numbers in conflicts with the Army, than the Officials, and that they have hegemony in more areas, certainly of Belfast. So that talk of them being a 'breakaway' can only be calculated to sting them into proving their military capacity, and talk of the Provisionals being more 'militant' must be designed to prod the Officials into proving their own 'virility' (to use a favourite term of the same press)."

Comrade Purdie offered this concluding judgment on the Officials:

"Nevertheless, regular readers of *The Red Mole* will no doubt be aware that we have paid a great deal of attention to the evolution of the Official Republican Movement: it is clear from what we have written that we consider them to be the most important socialist organisation in Ireland today. We think that in the long term they will play a much greater role in liberating Ireland than will the Provisionals. This is not solely because of the fact that the Officials have embraced a socialist perspective; much more important is their capability of giving a political lead to the Irish people. In a situation where the British Army is smashing up Ardoyne or Ballymurphy, the Provisionals can gain widespread support for their military effectiveness. But were British imperialism suddenly to change its tactics, and not offer the minority this provocation, even if only for a period, the Provisionals would have no role to play within these communities. Whereas the Officials have been working patiently to raise the political consciousness of the entire working class of the Six Counties, agitating on such issues as housing, jobs, etc. It is significant that the area of Belfast which was behind barricades in August '69, the Lower Falls, is the area where the officials are strongest; the experience of that struggle must have raised the general level of political consciousness."

The first sign of the IMG's interest in the Official republican movement came when the May 1970 issue of the *Red Mole* reprinted an interview with the Official leader Malachy McGurran from *Intercontinental Press*. Contacts seem to have developed subsequent to that, leading to Comrade Purdie's visit to Belfast in July 1970 and to the Official Ard Fheis in December 1970. But at the same time, the IMG came in contact with, or began to take more seriously, a group of adventurers expelled from the republican movement in the 1960s. These adventurers were associated with Gery Lawless, an "independent" Trotskyist who had broken with the republican movement in 1955, accusing it of reluctance to begin the guerrilla campaign for which it began preparing with the arms raids in the early 1950s. Many of them were ex-members of the Irish Workers Group, a heterogeneous grouping led by Comrade Lawless which disintegrated in early 1968. The IMG's interest in this group seemed to increase at the end of 1970 when Comrade Lawless joined the IMG and became the co-leader of its Irish work.

### An Irish ERP

In its January 1-15, 1971, issue, the *Red Mole* published an interview with a representative of this grouping, Saor Eire, which offered a different version of the movement toward politics in the Official IRA. This interview was announced on a cover with a picture of a guerrilla pointing a gun at the reader. In answer to a question about the split in the republican movement, this anonymous spokesman said:

"Well, we have seen the inevitability of such a split occurring for the last eight years. We did not particularly favour it since, unfortunately, it happened over wrong issues. In the official section, we have an amalgam of peaceful roadmen, reformers, and left-wingers; and within the Provisionals, we have more militant elements, but right-wing politics. In practice, we have found ourselves more closely aligned to the Provisionals, it is among

those elements that we draw a lot of our support.

"Of course, it is important to draw a distinction between the leadership and the rank-and-file in both these organisations. Both leaderships seem equally opposed to us and equally capable of spreading slanders about us, whereas with both rank-and-files we have very much in common. We are grateful for the help that Cathal Goulding, the chief of staff of the official IRA, sent in relation to Frank Keane's case. But we condemn unequivocally their actions in issuing disclaimers and thereby helping police to finger our organization in the Arran Quay robbery."

The representative described the origins of his organization in this way:

"I'll have to go back to the '60s and trace the development of the Republican movement. After the failure of the mid-'50s military campaign in the Six Counties, a certain amount of disillusionment set in within the IRA and Sinn Fein. People saw the futility of a purely military campaign not backed up by some form of political action. In the early '60s some people connected with the London-based 'Irish Democrat' joined the movement. Their Stalinist politics were not accepted overnight, but on account of the lack of clear-cut politics within the Republican movement, the position was that any brand of politics was accepted. With the influx of these people, political classes were started, which were good in themselves, as they gave many members of the Republican movement their first knowledge of left-wing politics; but hand in hand with the growing political awareness, there began a running-down of the armed section, the IRA. This unfortunately led to a lot of people equating left-wing politics with reformism. Many of our members at this stage started to voice their objections to this running down of the IRA. These people were either dismissed on trumped-up charges or left of their own accord. Other members saw through the politics of Stalinism and left on a political basis.

"At this time too, many English-based revolutionary groups started to spring up. People saw in these groups alternatives to the Irish Communist Party and to the current Stalinist orientation of the Republican movement, and thought that maybe, through such organisations, a new fusion could be made between left-wing politics and the traditional militancy of Republicanism. Some people who had been involved in the Trotskyist English-based Irish Workers' Group formed an important section of Saor Eire and began to form links with these dissident elements of the Republican movement. This resulted in a loose organisation being formed in Dublin about three to four years ago, which carried out some arms raids and some bank raids in an attempt to try to get a militant politically conscious, armed group off the ground. After these initial actions there was not such a mass movement toward this grouping as was expected, since its actions were seen as more in the tradition of the international revolutionary movement, as opposed to the Irish movement. The next period was spent in discussion with various political groupings, and with various members of the Republican movement, in an attempt to win them over to this new concept of political action."

The method by which this tiny adventurist group hoped to stimulate a "mass movement" toward itself was ex-

plained as follows:

"Saor Eire is a left-wing armed group which is attempting to act as a fuse or detonator to the Irish revolutionary struggle. It is attempting to step up the tempo of development of political life. It is part of the Republican tradition but also draws from the international revolutionary movement, both politically and in a military sense. As opposed to past forms the Republican struggle took, Saor Eire is centred around the cities and could be called an urban guerrilla group, inasmuch as it sees the main struggle taking place in the cities, and within the working class directly."

As for Saor Eire's activities, although they did not exactly depend on mass support, they were designed to win mass sympathy:

"Unfortunately due to publicity given to us by the bourgeois press, people seem to think that we are only involved in robbing banks and living high lives, etc. etc. This could not be further from the truth. We *have* robbed many banks and taken responsibility for them. But we have also been involved in armed raids, in industrial disputes, in direct confrontations with the state and its agents, also in local disputes and tenants' disputes. The money expropriated from the banks is used to purchase arms and equipment for the forthcoming struggle in Ireland. A lot of our finances have gone to aid the Catholic population of the North who have been under attack from British imperialism. This took the form of money, ammunition, and equipment. The money is also used for the maintenance of our revolutionaries in the field, who, at the moment, number quite a few. It is also used for political education, the arrangement of classes, camps, and all of the other running expenses that any armed group is liable to. We're also involved in military training of members of other left-wing groups in Ireland, people from the North, and the broad Republican movement, who have not been able to get this training within their own organisations." (Emphasis in original.)

Despite a certain autonomy from the masses, Saor Eire was not, it was explained, a foquista group: "We don't believe that the foco itself can become the party or has any monopoly on the revolution. But small guerrilla groupings, to a certain extent independent of the working class, *can* help to raise the level of the working class and so help to create the party." (Emphasis in original.)

In fact, Saor Eire was a very special kind of guerrilla group, one sympathetic to the Fourth International and especially to the International's support for "armed struggle," an Irish facsimile of the Argentine Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo! An exemplification of the correctness of the line of the Ninth World Congress. . . .

"As regards the Fourth International: we recognise the revolutionary role it has played since its inception; how it came to the aid of the Algerian revolution with arms and weapons while other so-called revolutionary organisations failed to fulfil their duty. We also admire how they came to the aid of the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions and defended them against imperialism, in America and throughout the world. We are particularly sympathetic to the political assistance it is giving the Irish struggle at the moment. While the Stalinists have consistently dilly-dallied and vacillated on the question of Ireland and on the role of armed struggle in Ireland,

the Fourth International is probably the only organization which has consistently given it support. A lot of our members have been, at some time or other, members of Trotskyist groupings."

Not only did Saor Eire have a certain appearance of Trotskyist politics, it laid claim to its own tradition in Ireland.

"As regards Saor Uladh, again we have much in common with them. This was a group which broke away from the Republican movement specifically on the question of armed action, which is a revolutionary feature. We also believe in their concept that the resolving of the Irish national struggle could not take place in the Six Counties alone, but would be resolved in a Thirty-Two County context. However, unfortunately, with Saor Uladh, this military outlook was not accompanied by the relevant and necessary political framework. For this reason they failed."

The thirty-two county perspective of Saor Uladh, the group that did perhaps the most to precipitate the 1956 border campaign, consisted of two features. Its leader, Liam Kelly, sat in both the Belfast and Dublin parliaments, assisted in the second case by a liberal parliamentary breakaway from the main republican movement. It, unlike the regular movement, conducted raids in the south that were used as pretexts by the Dublin government to intern IRA men on the green side of the border. It was this second feature that Saor Eire seemed to have in common with the old Saor Uladh, as well as its desire to precipitate the main body of republicans into guerrilla warfare by its example. This historic contribution of Saor Uladh was praised by Comrade Purdie, the main spokesman of the IMG on the Irish question, in his pamphlet *Ireland Unfree* published in January 1972: "Behind Saor Eire's activities is the conviction that no change can be promoted with the Republican Movement unless it is pressurised by a more militant and active military organisation. This approach contains a great deal of truth, for the launching of a struggle in 1956 by Saor Uladh catapulted the main body of the IRA into the Border Campaign, and forced the leadership of the IRA down off its conservative pedestal."

Until the writing of Comrade Purdie's pamphlet, the opinion had been held virtually unanimously, including in Republican circles, that the abortive terrorist campaign beginning in 1956 was an unmitigated disaster that strengthened Unionism and brought the militant nationalist movement to its lowest ebb in the entire history of the country. In fact, it was this total failure of the traditional terrorist methods that forced the republican leadership to look for new methods anywhere it could find something that seemed sensible. To be consistent with his support for "armed struggle," Comrade Purdie was apparently forced to find a positive evaluation of the border campaign: "Despite the failures of that campaign, the fact that it was fought faced a new generation of Irish men and women with the imperative challenge of the oppression of their nation; that new generation brought into the struggle the forces which today have opened up a new chapter in the political development of the Irish revolutionary Movement."

It was notable also that in this evaluation, Comrade Purdie adopted the version of the 1956 split put forward

by Comrade Lawless, who was an ally at that time of Saor Uladh and one of the group trying to force the IRA leadership to begin guerrilla warfare immediately, threatening to initiate armed actions himself with his own small group. Comrade Purdie was obviously in no position to make such a judgment himself, having no personal knowledge of the unwritten history of the IRA and the attitudes of the leaders of the time.

Comrade Lawless, however, did play a direct role. This is the version given by B. Bowyer Bell in *The Secret Army*, the most authoritative history of the IRA. It has not been commented on in the *Red Mole*: "The group of radicals led by Gery Lawless, a tough, violent, undisciplined agitator, left the ultra-conservative Army they distrusted and went with Christle. Magan opposed any compromise and even refused to allow the repentant Lillis to return. The drain continued over several weeks and the bitterness grew. Even the Fianna Boy Scouts split. The 'Christle Group' met in a convention and decided on action with three months and expansion throughout the country. Support was solicited from units in Meath, Limerick, and elsewhere but without firm results. The pace was too slow for some. Lawless and Sean Geraghty felt Christle was hedging and 'kidnapped' him to urge action. Refusing to talk under duress, Christle later agreed to the three-month provision. Both groups agreed that if they began action the IRA or Kelly would have to quit stalling and begin fighting, which was just what the IRA did not want to do prematurely. . . .

"In September to get things moving, eighteen Volunteers from the old B Company moved up to the border of Donegal and Fermanagh and sat, hoping to blackmail either Kelly or the IRA into action. Eventually this Lawless 'column' withdrew and Christle agreed to amalgamate with Kelly, who had little Twenty-six County support outside the border areas. A joint border operation was planned for November against customs posts." (pp. 279-280).

There was, however, a dynamic in the activity of the Lawless group that could have been understood by a Marxist without any need for inside information on the 1956 split. None of the guerrilla campaigns of the IRA have ever been initiated by a deliberate decision of the leadership, not even the war of independence in 1919. In every case, individuals attracted to the IRA by the appeal of armed action and without political training or discipline have quickly begun to press for an immediate start to the campaign and eventually initiated actions themselves that have catapulted the entire organization into guerrilla warfare. In every case the leadership has found itself incapable of controlling this process and ended up in fact riding a tiger.

In the case of the 1919-21 war, this uncontrolled activity was able to win a partial victory because there was a solid front of the nation, including most of the bourgeoisie, against the British. Once the bourgeoisie and bourgeois-oriented elements achieved their limited aims, however, they found it relatively easy to isolate the IRA and defeat it. The people were worn out by the high cost of uncontrolled guerrilla war. Furthermore, the masses were not directly involved in this struggle, and it did not seem to be directly related to their most intimate concerns. Every attempt to revive the type of guerrilla warfare

that existed in 1919-21, and there has been no lack of attempts over the past fifty years, has been a complete failure. The most successful try to date has been the Provisional campaign. But this in a certain sense grew out of the mass agitation of the Civil Rights movement.

By identifying Saor Uladh and the Lawless group as the "revolutionary" detonator in 1956, the IMG leaders identified Trotskyism with the purest traditions of guerrillaist adventurism in Ireland. This fact was all the more glaring in view of the context in which *The Red Mole* published the Saor Eire interview. In November, the premier of the Dublin government announced that his regime was prepared to introduce mass internment of political suspects and might do so at any time. It was forced to consider such a step, he said, because the police had discovered a conspiracy by Saor Eire, a group that had been carrying out a series of expropriations since about 1966 but which almost no one knew anything about, to kidnap some cabinet ministers, kidnapping, as everyone knew, being a popular tactic of urban guerrilla groups. In particular, because of their history, the large Republican groups could be linked in the public mind to the activities of Saor Eire.

Representatives of the Official IRA protested that there was no need to open a concentration camp if the government was only worried about Saor Eire, since all its members could be interned in one cell. The IMG, however, was determined to present Saor Eire as a serious force in Ireland, since "the brunt of the witch-hunt has been borne by a group whose name up to now has been practically unknown to the British left—Saor Eire." After all, Saor Eire was *almost* Trotskyist. It is clear that by offering this group two full pages of the *Red Mole*, in which the Saor Eire representative explained the "internationalist" character of the group as well as its military activities and aspirations, the IMG gave credence to the Dublin government's claim that the activities of Saor Eire did represent a serious danger to "order" in Ireland and thereby reinforced its pretext for launching an all-out attack on the left and militant nationalist movement. In order to give a forum to an *almost* Trotskyist guerrilla group, it endangered the entire radical movement in the Twenty-Six Counties and in particular the militants who identified with Trotskyism. Was it worth it? Apparently it was to the IMG, which for a whole period put Saor Eire at the center of its strategy for Ireland.

### The Trotskyist Guerrilla Expert

At the same time as it discovered Saor Eire, the IMG seemed to discover the guerrilla expertise of Comrade Lawless, who, although he had lived primarily in London in the 1960s in regular contact with the various Trotskyist groups, had not played a major role in the Trotskyist movement until that time. Nor had any Trotskyist group in Britain shown a great interest in his guerrilla credentials. He was, however, to emerge as the "military" expert of the IMG and, apparently, as the IEC Majority Tendency's example of an Irish "Trotskyist" guerrilla.

In Belgium, in particular, Comrade Lawless's past was especially appreciated in Trotskyist circles. In fact, in their zeal to defend the IRA's right to speak in Belgium, the Belgian Trotskyists went so far as to publicize Comrade Lawless as a representative of the IRA, which, of course,

he was not. In introducing an interview with Comrade Lawless, the February 18, 1972 issue of *La Gauche* offered this sketch of his qualifications on the Irish question: "Jerry [sic] Lawless (a fated name). Sentenced thirty-six times (this is an exact figure and not just intended to impress), imprisoned many times, notably for belonging to the IRA. Interned in a British concentration camp as a child. Described by the Unionist government of Northern Ireland as one of those responsible for the present agitation in Ulster. Sought by the British police."

In this interview, moreover, Comrade Lawless presented a different view of the split in the IRA from that offered in the *Red Mole* in 1970 by Comrade Purdie.

"In 1969 we were in a situation where the IRA had relegated the role of armed force to a secondary position and the IRA underestimated the importance of resorting to arms. We found ourselves then facing a 'virtual' civil war unleashed by the Unionist party.

"The IRA was badly prepared, incapable in fact of facing the needs of the moment. This coincided with the return, under the pressure of the threat of civil war, of many comrades who had left the IRA in 1962.

"They had left in 1962 because they considered themselves regular soldiers. They said: 'The fatherland has no more need of my services for the moment and I will go back and start a family.'

"Jo Khal [Joe Cahill], one of the leaders of the IRA, provisional wing, is a good example of this attitude. He left the IRA in 1962 to found a belated family, and he rejoined the IRA when the threat appeared again in 1969. Men like Khal coming from Belfast noticed two things when they rejoined the IRA. The first was that it was much more left than it had been before. The second was that it had many fewer arms than before. They equated the two phenomena and made a link between them—did the IRA get soft when it moved to the left? . . .

"Then there was a new politicized youth that mobilized to defend its own communities. They flooded into the IRA. The fact that the IRA had neither arms nor a strategy for armed struggle brought about a split. . . . Many comrades joined the Provisionals in Dublin and the border areas in particular not because this wing was more right or because it was hostile to the left, but because they were intransigent, they were aware of the need for armed struggle."

The IRA split and the subsequent development of the two groups is a complex question, and as the situation developed in the North, the Provisionals did win broader support than the Officials. It is quite possible, moreover, that the Provisional republican movement will become the central element in the development of the Irish revolutionary movement in the next period, as it, like the Officials before, learns the inadequacy of Blanquist militarism and looks for more advanced revolutionary conceptions.

### Armed Struggle, Yes; National Liberation, No

Comrades Purdie and Lawless analyzed the secret of the Provisionals' success rather well in their article "Ireland: The Eye of the Hurricane" in the July 10, 1972, *Red Mole*.

"The fact that the Provisionals have been better able to intervene in the last period will surprise only the dogmatists on the British Left who insist on misunderstanding



everything which happens outside their editorial offices. During the present phase of permanent revolution in Ireland, when national struggle is in the forefront, it is only to be expected that the most consistent nationalists will play the leading role."

It is unfortunate that this lesson has not received greater emphasis in the summaries and reprints of the IMG's positions on Ireland that have been circulated by the European sections as the Trotskyist answer to such questions. Of course, it does not fit in very well with the line on nationalism put forward in the key document of the IEC Majority Tendency, *In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International*, where Comrade Germain takes a notably dim view of the idea that "consistent nationalism" leads toward a process of permanent revolution:

"This Leninist opposition to nationalism is not an abstract and formal principle, but starts, as Lenin indicates, from a 'clear notion of the historical and economic circumstances.' That is why there can be some exceptions to the rule based upon exceptional 'historical and economic circumstances,' i.e. those of oppressed nationalities which do not yet possess their own ruling class, or which have only such a miserable embryo of a bourgeois that, in the given and foreseeable situation, it is excluded that this embryo could actually become a ruling class without a complete disintegration of the imperialist structure. The best example of such exceptions are of the black and Chicano nationalities inside the United States. We shall discuss them in more detail in the final section of this text.

"But it is clear that neither Quebec, Catalonia, the Basque country, India, Ceylon nor the Arab nation, can be classified as exceptional. All these nations have their own bourgeois class. Many of them even have their own semi-colonial bourgeois state. To support nationalism within these nationalities, under the pretext of supporting anti-imperialist liberation struggles, or even to defend the doctrine that 'consistent nationalism' would automatically lead to a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat is to lose the 'clear notion of the historical and economic circumstances,' to lose sight of the class structure, the class decisions and the irreconcilable class conflicts inside these nations, which national oppression or economic exploitation by imperialism in no way eliminates but, in a certain sense, even exacerbates when compared to what occurs in non-oppressed nations. To defend the notion of 'unconditional support' for Quebec nationalism, Arab nationalism, Indian nationalism, or Ceylon nationalism, is to disarm the workers and poor peasants of these countries in their class struggle against their own bourgeoisie, is to make the conquest of power by the proletariat in the course of the anti-imperialist struggle—i.e. the whole process of permanent revolution—more difficult if not impossible, and puts a big obstacle on the road of building Leninist parties among these nationalities." (Page 34.)

Oddly, Comrade Germain omits mentioning Irish nationalism. But why is there any reason, according to this, to regard Ireland as exceptional? Isn't there an Irish national bourgeoisie that has its own state? Haven't elements of it even called for armed confrontations with the imperialist power? Furthermore, there is a certain logic to Comrade Germain's positions, which has become clearer with the development of the international discussion.

For example, in its main resolution at the 1973 convention of the SWP, the Internationalist Tendency, whose positions were endorsed by one of the principal spokesmen of the IEC Majority Tendency, Livio Maitan, as well as by Peter Petersen of the IMG, was even more negative about the possibility of "consistent nationalism" playing any progressive role:

"Behind the party leadership's new vocabulary, there is an adaptation in practice to the petty bourgeois ideologies of nationalism and feminism. The SWP leadership's adaptationism is manifested both within and outside of the borders of the United States. In fact, it is not restricted to national groups but has been extended to include women. The nub of the issue is contained in the formula that 'consistent nationalism will lead to socialism.' Alleged examples of this dynamic are the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions. In fact, it was the Castroist movement's break with nationalism, that is, with the concept of a national interest above classes, expressed in the smashing of the bourgeois state, that laid the basis for Cuba's advance toward socialism. In the same way, it is the NLF's ties to the workers' state of North Vietnam, rather than its diffused nationalist ideology, that have made it able to endure as a fighting force against imperialism. Marxists have always characterized nationalism as a bourgeois ideology, i.e., a false perception of reality and an apology for particular interests, and have counterposed it to the scientific theory of international socialism.

"Lenin's distinction between the nationalism of the oppressed and that of the oppressor applies to the Communist attitude toward the two varieties of nationalism. It did not mean that we should endorse the nationalism of the oppressed, but rather, that while we intransigently fight the nationalism of the oppressor, our attitude is to patiently explain the bankruptcy of nationalism to the liberation fighters of oppressed nations. In some cases during the incipient stages of a colonial revolution, nationalism may play a progressive role in drawing the masses into action against imperialism. In such cases we give it critical support. But, we recognize that nationalism can only give the masses relief from the most superficial forms of oppression, as with the granting of formal independence. In order to advance the masses, it is necessary for revolutionaries to dispel the notion that all layers of the oppressed nation share common oppression. They must point out the bankruptcy of the petty bourgeois nationalist leadership, counterpose proletarian internationalism, and become the leaders of the struggle of the masses against imperialism. This requires a qualitative break from the ideology of nationalism and the opening of a world revolutionary perspective, which is precisely the function of a revolutionary party.

"The SWP leadership's adaptation to nationalism also takes another form: tail-ending the petty bourgeois program and leadership of national liberation struggles. The case of Palestine was the clearest example of this tendency. The SWP uncritically endorsed Al Fatah's call for a Democratic Secular Palestine [Isn't this what the term "republic" means to the Irish republicans, Comrades Purdie and Lawless?—G. F.], without charifying its class content. In the case of Vietnam, Bangla Desh and Ireland, the SWP leadership has confined the party's propaganda to the

call for self-determination, without raising the need for the establishment of a workers' state as central to the colonial revolution." ("The Building of a Revolutionary Party in Capitalist America," *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 31, No. 18, pp. 7-8.)

This attitude toward "consistent nationalism" has become a rather important part of the discussion going on in the International. For example, in offering its "critical support" to the IEC Majority Tendency, the "June 10 Tendency" in the SWP cited as the first evidence of the alleged "rightward motion" of the American party: "The SWP leadership's refusal to participate in the Women's Liberation movement and in National Liberation struggles as revolutionary Marxists forwarding a socialist program . . ." The first thing it cited as justification for adhering to the IEC Majority Tendency was:

"To the SWP's minimalist call for 'Self-determination for Bangla Desh,' the International Majority has countered, 'For a Socialist Indian Sub-Continent.'

"To the SWP's call for a 'Democratic Secular Palestine,' they proclaim, 'For a Socialist Federation in the Middle East.'" ("Position Paper on the Current Dispute in the International," *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 31, No. 29, pp. 18-19.)

Wouldn't the same method in the case of Ireland lead to the slogan of a "Socialist Federation of the British Isles"? or to counterposing "For a United Socialist Europe" to the slogan of "Self-Determination for Ireland"? In any case, until further discussion clarifies the matter, we must assume that most of the members of the IEC Majority Tendency in Europe who support the IMG line on Ireland are unable to appreciate the factor of "consistent nationalism" in the success of the Provisional IRA, and regard the Provisionals' dedication to "armed struggle" as their essential positive feature.

It is quite clear in his interview in the February 18, 1972; *La Gauche* that Comrade Lawless sees the revolutionary side of the Provisionals precisely in their maintaining the old "physical force" tradition of the Republican movement, which Comrade Purdie described in 1970 as "backward" and subject to manipulation by right-wing elements. Furthermore Comrade Lawless does not criticize the 1956-62 campaign for failing to involve the masses actively in a deepgoing struggle, a failure recognized by Comrade Purdie in his first articles, but for its failure simply to "organize" the "popular support" that existed for the campaign.

And this line has clearly come to dominate the IMG's analysis over the past two years. The evolution is obvious. Comrade Lawless was not integrated into the Trotskyist movement. His adventurist past and his present adventurist conceptions were and are hailed both by the IMG leadership and the leaders of the IEC Majority Tendency in Europe, especially by those comrades most directly influenced by the principal leader of this tendency, Comrade Mandel himself.

Instead of offering a political perspective, the arsenal of Marxism, and the Leninist conception of how to mobilize the masses in revolutionary struggle, the IMG and the European Trotskyist sections and groups progressively adapted to the "physical force" tradition of the republicans, to the idea that revolutionary activity consists

essentially of the activity of armed commandos.

This conception, as the founder of Irish Marxism James Connolly pointed out, is an essentially petty-bourgeois notion. It grew out of the inability of the socially heterogeneous Young Ireland Movement to develop a social program for organizing the masses. As a result they fell back on a program of military conspiracy that enabled them to avoid raising social questions. This was precisely the response of the right-wing republicans to the development of a left tendency, of a social program in the organization. This was a response, moreover, that the reactionary American Irish leaders were anxious to support and which led them to provide the Provisionals with money to buy far more arms than the Officials could afford.

In his first articles, Comrade Purdie was capable of recognizing this dynamic. But progressively the spokesmen of the IMG, and their echoers in the European Trotskyist press, came to second the claims of the Provisionals that armed action as such was the decisive question. In fact, the spokesmen of European Trotskyism came increasingly to oppose the dynamic that was pushing the Provisionals to the left, their "consistent nationalism," and to hail the tendency that was preventing them from drawing political and social conclusions from this process—their militarism.

### **The Irish Had Better Not Call Off the 'Armed Struggle'**

This tendency reached a logical conclusion in *La Gauche's* response to the Official cease-fire in May 1972. As a result of a disastrous popular reaction to an act of terrorism in Derry, the execution of a British soldier from a local family who was believed to be a spy, the Official IRA announced that they were suspending offensive operations against the British army. The shooting of Best in Derry was only the latest in a series of terrorist acts that had had disastrous results for the Officials—the Aldershot bombing, the assassination of the Unionist Senator Barnhill, the attempted assassination of the Unionist Home Minister John Taylor being other examples. The Official leadership realized that it was getting caught in a dynamic that it could not control; it was getting drawn into a terrorist campaign that had no hope of success. Small groups of IRA men were carrying out politically damaging actions in the belief that they were acting as the "Army of the People" when in fact they were under the control of no mass organization.

The cease-fire decision by no means meant the end of armed actions by the Official IRA, and members of the organization continued to be gunned down in clashes with the British army and Orange terrorists. But the Official call for a return to mass struggle apparently caused consternation in some European Trotskyist circles. After all, the organ of the largest European section of the Fourth International had expressed its support specifically for the "armed struggle" of the Irish people in its manifesto on the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry and projected this "armed struggle" as the future for capitalist Europe:

"The workers of Europe must keep their eyes fixed on the armed struggle taken up on Irish soil since 1968 against British occupation. It is not only the instability

or the latent crisis of British capitalism that is illustrated here, but also that of its European confederates. Ireland is only a foretaste of the crushing of the freedoms of traditional bourgeois democracy, of the trend toward the strong state which is in preparation throughout capitalist Europe." (*Rouge*, February 12, 1972, "L'Avenir de l'Europe.")

This statement appeared to represent a very strong determination to extend the Irish example, since Irish comrades would be hard put to find a time when "a strong state" did not exist in Ireland. When the Dublin government introduced a new special powers bill in the fall of 1972, this was interpreted in a letter to the March 1973 conference of Irish Trotskyists as another move toward the "strong state," although the Dublin regime has resorted to mass internment more than once in its recent history.

Another example of this eagerness to extend the experience of Ireland was the label "Armed Struggle in Europe" that was put on Comrade Lawless's tours on the continent and the desire to utilize the tour of the Official IRA representative Malachy McGurran to "make propaganda for armed struggle in Europe." Thus, it is easy to understand the disappointment of the Belgian comrades in particular when the Official IRA turned away from being drawn into a terrorist campaign.

This disappointment was expressed in an introduction to an article on the politics of the Provisionals by Comrades Lawless and Purdie that was reprinted in the December 26, 1972, *La Gauche*.

"When at the beginning of this year the LRT [Ligue Révolutionnaire des Travailleurs — Revolutionary Workers League, the Belgian section of the Fourth International] took up a campaign of explaining the armed struggle in Ireland, we expressed our support for both wings of the IRA—the Officials and the Provisionals. We explained then the differences between these two republican organizations, but these differences could not induce us to support one over the other. The positions taken recently by the Official wing of the IRA force us to take our distance from this organization. Above all there is the cease-fire announced by the Officials, which was motivated by the argument that if the IRA did not cease its armed struggle, it would provoke a civil war. In a situation of de facto civil war, the Officials thus have deserted the task of the military defense of the Catholic neighborhoods."

The motivation for the cease-fire given in the Official statements was incorrect and politically unclear, reflecting their inability to definitively renounce terrorism, but it was rather hasty to conclude that the Officials had abandoned the military defense of the Catholic neighborhoods. In fact, it was a slander against an organization that continued to suffer grave losses at the hands of British repression precisely because it continued to defend the Catholic neighborhoods by every means, including armed force.

This denunciation of one of the main organizations leading the struggle in Northern Ireland was an exceedingly grave step, one moreover that could have serious consequences for the Irish Trotskyists, as well as the reputation of the Fourth International in general in Ire-

land. How could it be taken without any international discussion or consultation whatsoever?

The only possible answer is that the IEC Majority Tendency had separated out armed action from the revolutionary process, had made support of armed activity the criterion sine qua non of a revolutionary attitude, and had furthermore applied this criterion in utter disregard of the opinion of sections of the Trotskyist movement that did not share its guerrillaist orientation. Thus such a conclusion was inevitable and automatic for the writer in *La Gauche*.

A supporter of the IEC Majority Tendency in the U. S., Chris Marat, followed the same logic:

"This confrontation with the bourgeoisie has taken on the aspects of urban guerrilla warfare during the past three years. The struggle has been led in Derry by both sections of the IRA until last year, when the 'officials' took their distance from the 'provisionals' in order to conform to the wishes of the bourgeoisie in the South. Contrary to popular opinion there remains only *one* IRA." [Emphasis in the original. "The Struggle for Proletarian Parties in Capitalist Europe," *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 31, no. 30, p. 7.]

Comrade Marat's conclusion, in one respect, does run counter to the line of the IMG. For example, in the March 30 *Red Mole*, an IMG Political Committee statement said: "The Provisional IRA is ideologically linked to the Southern bourgeoisie, and the Officials stages theory means in practice that they are incapable of linking their explicit socialism to the national struggle." But, nonetheless, isn't his conclusion a logical one? If a guerrilla strategy is the criterion sine qua non of a revolutionary organization, doesn't it follow that the Official IRA—clearly less enthusiastic about the prospects of guerrilla war, as shown by the cease-fire—is more under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie than the Provisionals who held on unswervingly to the guerrilla strategy? But what about Comrade Purdie's analysis in 1970 of the bourgeoisie's ability to divert a purely military struggle? It seems to have gotten lost somewhere in between.

*The Red Mole's* response to the Official cease-fire was as hasty and bitter as that of *La Gauche*. If its dedication to the principle of "self-determination" made it view with righteous horror the very idea of criticizing any armed action the IRA might resort to, the IMG apparently felt no such qualms about issuing a blanket condemnation of an Irish group that declared its intention to depart even temporarily from a concentration on guerrilla warfare.

In its June 5, 1972, issue, *The Red Mole* said:

"Already one section of the resistance forces, the Official Republican Army, has yielded to the pressure and announced a cease-fire." In its July 10 issue, *The Red Mole* said: "The Officials grabbed a few brief headlines with their cease-fire."

These intemperate attacks completely exposed the hypocrisy of the IMG's claim that its explicit support for "armed struggle" in Ireland was a way of "concretising" its support for self-determination. They made it absolutely clear that what the IMG was in fact doing was refusing support to any other kind of struggle in Ireland but one that suited its conception of a guerrilla strategy. Comrade Purdie himself had moved from his position of

August 1970 that the British troops were deliberately trying to provoke the IRA into armed conflicts to a position that it was the armed actions of the Provisionals in particular that were the essential obstacle to imperialist policy.

In an article in the September 15, 1971, *Red Mole*, Comrade Purdie argued that if the British failed to win the support of Lynch in Dublin, they would be forced to try to restore the old system of all-out repression of the Northern Catholics. Only the armed struggle of the Provisionals could prevent this:

"If the situation is returned to the old order and the Catholics are defeated, the whole development of a revolutionary struggle in Ireland will be set back. It was the existence of the stalemate over the Northern question which froze Irish politics for fifty years; there is a danger that they could be recast in that reactionary mold once more.

"It is for this reason that we raise the slogan 'Victory to the IRA'; the whole future of the struggle in Ireland depends on whether the volunteers of the Official and Provisional IRA can resist British imperialism, and can prevent them from imposing their strategy on the North. It is the armed resistance to the British Army which is the key to the development of the struggle. If it fails, British imperialism will smash the possibility of any independent political action by the nationalist minority. This would prevent the development of any leadership emerging which was superior to the present leadership of the IRA in ability to develop a correct revolutionary strategy."

One consequence of this theory was a clear tendency to separate out the "military" struggle from the general anti-imperialist struggle. In a reply to a letter from IS criticizing the IMG for giving uncritical support to the IRA, the IMG Political Committee replied:

"In the case of Ireland therefore we have to sort out several points. Firstly does either wing of the IRA have a programme capable of destroying the hold of British imperialism on Ireland. This in fact boils down to the question of whether the IRA can destroy capitalism in Ireland. The answer to that question is clearly NO. The Provisional IRA is ideologically linked to the Southern bourgeoisie, and the Officials' stages theory means in practice that they are incapable of linking their explicit socialism to the national struggle. Therefore any slogan which states that the IRA can destroy British imperialism is completely incorrect. Any Marxist who holds to the theory of Permanent Revolution must accept this. Nevertheless this is entirely different to saying that the IRA cannot defeat the British army. Here in practice we may think it unlikely but it is not theoretically excluded in the same sense as is the IRA destroying British imperialism. There are many examples of struggles in which imperialist armies have been defeated without capitalism being destroyed and thereby destroying imperialism. We have already noted Algeria and the case of the FLN; Aden and Cyprus are other examples." (*The Red Mole*, March 30, 1972.)

While the IMG Political Committee's analysis of the impasse of the Official IRA's stages theory was correct, it could be objected that they themselves seemed to accept a kind of stages theory—military victory first, political

victory later. In this conception, what becomes of the permanent revolution in Ireland? Can the national bourgeoisie or forces "ideologically linked" to it win the political independence and unity of the country or not? If they can, wouldn't that justify the Officials' fear of the national bourgeoisie co-opting the struggle in the North, the fear precisely that led subjectively revolutionary leaders like Malachy McGurran, for instance, who does not hold the stages theory, to adopt a politically sectarian attitude toward the mass national struggle? Furthermore, if a purely military victory over British imperialism is possible, how could the IMG oppose the purely militarist conceptions of the Provisional leadership and the bulk of the rank and file, whose conception of the struggle is limited to the desire to defeat the repressive forces of imperialism and oust them from the country?

### **Reformism Turned Upside Down: An Ultraleft Revision of Permanent Revolution**

Moreover, the IMG not only exaggerated the power of bourgeois nationalism; it exaggerated the potency of the proimperialist bourgeoisie of the North. Not only could nationalists "ideologically linked" to the Southern bourgeoisie defeat British imperialism; the Orange bourgeoisie itself was powerful enough to balk the policy of the British capitalist class and prevent it from achieving a political solution in the North. It was on this premise that the IMG based its contention that the British could not isolate the guerrillas from the Catholic population. Any concessions would be opposed by the Orange bourgeoisie.

In its August 7, 1972, issue, for example *The Red Mole* wrote: "But protestant extremism remains a block to any progress in Ireland. In Lenadoon Avenue, the Provisionals manoeuvred the British into a choice between taking on the UDA and bursting the bubble, or capitulating to their pressure. Predictably British imperialism lined up once more with Orange reaction, despite their long term desire to 'normalise' sectarianism out of Six County politics.

"From this capitulation the rest follows. It is not possible to give in to one side in the Six Counties without pushing hard against the other. The Provisionals having gained a new position of strength it was necessary for the British to attempt to gain the ascendancy over them in order to avoid being pushed against the UDA again. Since this could not be achieved politically the superior technical resources and fire power of the British Army had to be asserted. The invasion was not only in line with this, but it was a very substantial scrap which could be thrown to the wolves of the Protestant right."

An editorial in the same issue said: "Whitelaw failed because in the Six Counties any concessions given or promised to the catholic minority will always result in the mobilisation of the mass of the protestants determined to retain their ascendancy and sectarian institutions."

It is true that the outdated ideology and fanaticism of the Orange population makes them an unwieldy instrument of repression for British imperialism, which must, however roughly it has to handle them at times, still retain their loyalty. But this is not a new problem. It has existed for the entire history of Orangeism. In fact, for a whole period in the nineteenth century British imperialism found itself forced to outlaw the traditional



Orange processions, whose purpose is to intimidate the Catholic population. The dilemma of British imperialism was stated already by the magistrate Thomas Knox in 1796: "As to the Orangemen, we have a rather difficult card to play; they must not be entirely discountenanced — on the contrary, we must in a certain degree uphold them, for with all their licentiousness, on them we must rely for the preservation of our lives and properties, should critical times occur. We do not suffer them to parade, but at the same time applaud them for loyal professions." (Hereward Senior, *Orangeism in Ireland and Britain 1795-1836*, p. 45.) Furthermore, the "licentiousness" of the Orangemen in the 1790s played a major role in driving the Catholics into the arms of the revolutionists and provoking the revolution of 1798.

However, by attributing to the Orangemen effective independence from British bourgeois hegemony and the control of the British ruling class, the IMG departed fundamentally from the principles of class analysis. Moreover, as a result of this eclectic schematism they underestimated the ability of the British ruling class to maneuver and exaggerated the effectiveness of a "blunt instrument," that is, the apolitical terrorism of the Provisionals. "It is the armed struggle which has created the situation in which imperialism has been unable to impose a solution, and which has underpinned the self-confidence of the minority." (Bob Purdie, *Ireland Unfree*, p. 63.)

The centrality of the terrorist campaign was defended, moreover, by exaggerating the ability of British imperialism to democratise Northern Ireland. It was wrong, according to Comrade Purdie, to try to mobilize the masses around the democratic demands most acutely felt by them because imperialism was ready to meet these demands. What imperialism could not accept was "armed struggle" that kept it from "stabilizing" the situation. Against the Officials' contention that civil rights was the key issue around which to organize in the North, Comrade Purdie argued in an article in the October 16, 1972 *Red Mole*:

"There are three dangerous elements in this argument. Firstly, it is true that the British have refused to grant the demands of the Civil Rights Association, for such simple concessions as a Bill of Rights. But this is not because they are opposed to civil rights. On the contrary, they have been anxious to 'normalise' the North for a long time. This is indeed essential for their long term plans to re-orient their relationships with the gombeen bourgeoisie in the South. They resist such demands because they are trying to re-establish stability, and they know that concessions to the Catholic minority on that scale would deepen the mass Orange resistance.

"So they balance delicately, while trying to achieve their main priority at this time; the *de-mobilization of the Catholic resistance*. If they achieve this, through militarily smashing the Provos, and/or exhausting the minority, it is quite possible that they will introduce sweeping reforms in the North, as a means of sealing up the crack in the dam which nearly flooded them. Such reforms would aim at buying off the catholic resistance, and eliminating some of the structural factors which have made the catholic revolt so powerful. It is doubtful, even given the above conditions, that Britain could actually solve the Northern Ireland problem, through internal reform,

but at least they could create a period of stabilisation.

"In this situation the Officials' schema would have two disastrous results. It would mistake as a victory of the minority, what would in fact be a consolidation and strengthening of British imperialism. *And, more important, they would not be prepared for the inevitable smashing of the resistance organisations which would accompany such a strategy.* The Official Republicans would go down along with the Provos, PD, et al. and despite the 'democracy' would be unable to advocate any 'sort of Ireland.'" (Emphasis in original.)

Fundamentally, Comrade Purdie's theory was simply a left version of the concept held by the centrist CRA leaders that the British bourgeoisie essentially wanted to introduce normal bourgeois democracy. The conclusions that they drew were that they could use the interests of the British bourgeoisie as a lever against the Orange state and that the basic problem was to force the London government to grant these reforms in a "hot" way, that is, in response to mass pressure, rather than in a cold way, from above. According to Comrade Purdie, the problem for revolutionists was to prevent the British bourgeoisie from offering such reforms by blocking "stabilization" through the use of terrorism.

Both the approach of the centrist CRA leaders and that of Comrade Purdie deny the basic premise of the theory of permanent revolution, that is, that in the age of imperialism the imperialist bourgeoisie cannot carry out the tasks of eliminating the repressive instruments of rule characteristic of more backward social systems. The caste system in Ireland is one of the principal props of reaction not only in the smaller but in the larger of the British Isles. The notion that the British capitalist class is desirous or capable of eliminating it would mean that it still had the potential for carrying out major democratic tasks. Comrade Purdie's concept, therefore, represents a serious revision of a fundamental element of Trotskyist theory.

But doesn't Comrade Purdie avoid this? He says, for instance: "It is doubtful, even given the above conditions, that Britain could actually solve the Northern Ireland problem, through internal reform, but at least they could create a period of *stabilization*." *Doesn't this qualification* protect him against the charge of revisionism? Well, it does seem to be evidence of a general knowledge of the implications of the theory of permanent revolution. But what role does this qualification play in his overall conception? If the British ruling class cannot solve "the Northern Ireland problem, through internal reform," why would a period of stabilization following democratic reforms be so fatal? Wouldn't such victories encourage the Catholic minority to demand more? Wouldn't they encourage all the workers to look toward the dismantling of the archaic repressive society of Northern Ireland? If after centuries of repression, the Catholic people won important democratic concessions, why should this be the signal for them to turn over their most dedicated defenders to the jailers of imperialism and the Orange caste system? Wouldn't giving such democratic concessions require the imperialists and their local supporters to grant a large measure of political freedom to the revolutionists to explain to the masses the real "solution to the Northern



Ireland" problem, and in conditions favorable for the assimilation of this message?

If Comrade Purdie were convinced that the British ruling class is really unable to solve the Northern Ireland problem through reforms, it would be hard to understand why he apparently thinks it is so essential to maintain the kind of instability represented by the Provisional terrorist campaign. This concept of chaos at any cost is in fact rather typical of social groups irrevocably condemned by capitalist development, such as small farmers in the United States and elsewhere. But a Marxist would have to recognize that chronic unrest of the type that has existed in Northern Ireland since the collapse of the mass civil rights movement does not necessarily favor revolution. In fact, without clear political perspectives, it can exhaust and demoralize the majority of the population and prepare them to accept any "solution." Such a concept, then, that a decline or halt in the guerrilla struggle would mean inevitably the elimination of the revolutionists in Northern Ireland seems rather to represent the kind of desperation that comes from a feeling that capitalism has the power to solve its problems in its own way and not a conviction that imperialism is in a profound crisis. In short, Comrade Purdie's conception is an essentially reformist one turned upside down, that is, a classically ultraleft approach that represents a revision of the theory of permanent revolution.

Comrade Purdie's method here, moreover, is reminiscent of that illustrated by the document "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," which says: "Democratic demands will normally not be granted by the decaying imperialist bourgeoisie. But nothing organically, economically, socially, (i. e., in terms of basic class relations), prevents the bourgeoisie from granting them as a 'lesser evil' in order to avoid a mass movement approaching a victorious socialist revolution. Organically the 'national bourgeoisie' of the colonial world cannot solve the agrarian question without to a large extent expropriating itself. There is no fundamental obstacle of the same kind to prevent the realisation of free abortion on demand, or freedom of the press, or even a democratic electoral law in an imperialist country. Given a powerful mass upsurge with a revolutionary potential, the imperialist bourgeoisie can grant these concessions precisely in order to avoid expropriation.

"In normal circumstances, imperialism was in the past never willing to grant national independence to Quebec or Ireland. But given a prerevolutionary situation, a powerful upsurge of the workers' struggle, a concrete danger of a 'workers' republic' being set up, there is no fundamental interest which would prevent imperialism from transforming any nationality into independent puppet states.

"For these reasons the danger of a mass struggle in an imperialist country based solely on demands for national self-determination being absorbed by the bourgeoisie is very real. That is why revolutionary marxists must constantly combine in their propaganda and agitation, demands expressing the right of national self-determination for oppressed minorities with demands of a proletarian and socialist character in order to make this absorption much more difficult. This is what Trotsky

meant when he argued that we must prevent democratic demands in imperialist countries from becoming 'a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat.'

Trotsky's method, however, in contrast to that of Comrades Purdie and Germain was to try to impel struggles for democratic demands out of the context of the capitalist system by stimulating the natural dynamic that they have in the age of imperialism, not to try to slip in some specially concocted anti-capitalist vaccine from the start. The latter method is a subjectivist and voluntarist one and not a scientific one. So, if Comrade Purdie's program of chaos at any cost in order to prevent the British imperialists from co-opting the democratic demands of the Northern Irish Catholics does not seem on the surface to correspond to the "demands of a proletarian and socialist character" recommended by Comrade Germain for the same purpose, it clearly represents an outgrowth of the same logic. And this conclusion was undoubtedly made all the easier for Comrade Purdie by the increasing tendency of the Ninth World Congress majority to identify "armed struggle" in the abstract with revolutionary struggle.

Comrades Purdie and Germain's method is a formalistic, schematic one. Under pressure of a mass upsurge, imperialism may even admit reforms that go against its fundamental class interests, such as the dual power that existed for a whole period in Austria after World War I. The importance of such reforms is their place in the process of struggle for the completion of the democratic revolution, to which capitalism as a whole is now opposed. And the fact remains that the mass struggle in the North of Ireland was touched off by mobilizations in support of demands for simple democratic rights. For four years a violent struggle has been going on, necessitating the stationing of 20,000 British troops in Ireland, marked by the most acute crises such as a general strike in the South in February 1972 and serious dangers to the stability of the Dublin regime on at least two occasions, seizure of Republic of Ireland ships on the high seas by British vessels and even the threat at times of confrontations between British and Irish armed forces. And still the North has not been "democratised."

Furthermore, this method seems to have already led Comrade Purdie into making a serious miscalculation of the British ruling class's objectives. In his pamphlet *Ireland Unfree*, he writes:

"The strategy of the Irish revolution must therefore focus on sharpening the struggle in the North, to create the greatest possible crisis for British Imperialism, and the Irish bourgeoisie North and South. The main single factor which would attain this would be the smashing of Stormont [the Belfast parliament] and the complete disruption of the State, which would also involve the destruction of the Unionist Party as an instrument of British domination in Ireland. The unfolding events of the last three years have revealed that British Imperialism is willing to take any steps possible to preserve these two institutions, and that they are desperately afraid of the impetus which their eradication would give to the minority, and indeed to the whole Irish people. It is true that a small section of the British ruling class has been pressing for direct rule, but despite its ability to speak through the pages

Ireland" problem, and in conditions favorable for the assimilation of this message?

If Comrade Purdie were convinced that the British ruling class is really unable to solve the Northern Ireland problem through reforms, it would be hard to understand why he apparently thinks it is so essential to maintain the kind of instability represented by the Provisional terrorist campaign. This concept of chaos at any cost is in fact rather typical of social groups irrevocably condemned by capitalist development, such as small farmers in the United States and elsewhere. But a Marxist would have to recognize that chronic unrest of the type that has existed in Northern Ireland since the collapse of the mass civil rights movement does not necessarily favor revolution. In fact, without clear political perspectives, it can exhaust and demoralize the majority of the population and prepare them to accept any "solution." Such a concept, then, that a decline or halt in the guerrilla struggle would mean inevitably the elimination of the revolutionists in Northern Ireland seems rather to represent the kind of desperation that comes from a feeling that capitalism has the power to solve its problems in its own way and not a conviction that imperialism is in a profound crisis. In short, Comrade Purdie's conception is an essentially reformist one turned upside down, that is, a classically ultraleft approach that represents a revision of the theory of permanent revolution.

Comrade Purdie's method here, moreover, is reminiscent of that illustrated by the document "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," which says: "Democratic demands will normally not be granted by the decaying imperialist bourgeoisie. But nothing organically, economically, socially, (i. e., in terms of basic class relations), prevents the bourgeoisie from granting them as a 'lesser evil' in order to avoid a mass movement approaching a victorious socialist revolution. Organically the 'national bourgeoisie' of the colonial world cannot solve the agrarian question without to a large extent expropriating itself. There is no fundamental obstacle of the same kind to prevent the realisation of free abortion on demand, or freedom of the press, or even a democratic electoral law in an imperialist country. Given a powerful mass upsurge with a revolutionary potential, the imperialist bourgeoisie can grant these concessions precisely in order to avoid expropriation.

"In normal circumstances, imperialism was in the past never willing to grant national independence to Quebec or Ireland. But given a prerevolutionary situation, a powerful upsurge of the workers' struggle, a concrete danger of a 'workers' republic' being set up, there is no fundamental interest which would prevent imperialism from transforming any nationality into independent puppet states.

"For these reasons the danger of a mass struggle in an imperialist country based solely on demands for national self-determination being absorbed by the bourgeoisie is very real. That is why revolutionary marxists must constantly combine in their propaganda and agitation, demands expressing the right of national self-determination for oppressed minorities with demands of a proletarian and socialist character in order to make this absorption much more difficult. This is what Trotsky

meant when he argued that we must prevent democratic demands in imperialist countries from becoming 'a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat.'"

Trotsky's method, however, in contrast to that of Comrades Purdie and Germain was to try to impel struggles for democratic demands out of the context of the capitalist system by stimulating the natural dynamic that they have in the age of imperialism, not to try to slip in some specially concocted anti-capitalist vaccine from the start. The latter method is a subjectivist and voluntarist one and not a scientific one. So, if Comrade Purdie's program of chaos at any cost in order to prevent the British imperialists from co-opting the democratic demands of the Northern Irish Catholics does not seem on the surface to correspond to the "demands of a proletarian and socialist character" recommended by Comrade Germain for the same purpose, it clearly represents an outgrowth of the same logic. And this conclusion was undoubtedly made all the easier for Comrade Purdie by the increasing tendency of the Ninth World Congress majority to identify "armed struggle" in the abstract with revolutionary struggle.

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of the 'Sunday Times' it is still a minority, even the Labour Party leaders are united with the Tories in trying to preserve Stormont and the Unionists. They would like to use the Unionist Party, as the only viable bourgeois political formation in the North, to give reforms to the minority, they are quite unwilling that the minority should take them. They hope also in a new deal with Irish capitalism, to use the Unionist Party as a lever against Fianna Fail, whose Bonapartist nature and whose loose grip on the reigns [sic] of the power makes it a not completely reliable instrument.

"If Stormont were made unviable, and was swept out of the way, it would cause tremendous problems for British imperialism, it would give new confidence to the minority, and would stimulate the 26 County workers and small farmers, while also causing difficulties for Fianna Fail. We must be clear that these difficulties would not constitute an insuperable crisis for the British and Irish bourgeoisies, but they would open up new opportunities for advancing the revolution. Even if direct rule were imposed this could give imperialism at most a temporary respite, like that achieved by the Labour Government between August 1969 and July 1970. They could not fulfill the expectations of the minority, since they could not overcome the resistance to reform by the Protestant ultras, this would create the basis for a new and more effective struggle." (Pages 61-62.)

On March 25, 1972, only a month or two after the publication of this pamphlet, the British abolished Stormont and imposed direct rule. It was regarded as a victory by the minority, which, like Comrade Purdie, falsely believed that the main block to democratisation was the Orange apparatus. The change was actually rather slight; direct rule began in fact when British troops were first sent in. Comrade Purdie seems also to have forgotten that in the last analysis the state is a body of armed men, and the armed men present were under the direct command of the British government.

The immediate effect of direct rule was not to stimulate struggle but to touch off a peace movement that forced first the Official IRA and then the Provisionals to declare a cease-fire (although a brief one in the latter case). The British role of "arbiter" between Catholic and Protestant was reinforced and they were given considerably more flexibility to maneuver. Despite the spectacular resumption of the Provisional campaign, in July 1972, hailed by the IMG as a new stage of the struggle, it is now absolutely clear that the situation has been steadily deteriorating since the introduction of direct rule, and has presently reached its lowest ebb since 1968. The new governmental formulas are, of course, not the only factor in this. But it seems clear that the demand for the abolition of Stormont as such could not effectively educate the nationalist-minded masses about the real source of oppression, was not a serious obstacle to the maneuvers of British imperialism, and the actual granting of this demand did not advance the struggle of the Catholic minority. In short it appears undeniable at this point that Comrade Purdie made a fundamental error in his assessment of this demand. In his search for the most radical proposal, the one that would cause the greatest "disruption" of the state, he settled on the one that fitted in precisely with the long-term strategy of the British

ruling class. This error went deeper than a simple misjudgment of the conjunctural relationship of forces. It was the result of a revision of the theory of the permanent revolution that he picked up from the IEC Majority Tendency.

Comrade Purdie's overestimation of the capacity of British imperialism to carry out democratic reforms led him to exaggerate the differences between the Orange bourgeoisie and the imperialists. From such a wrong judgment, it followed that calling on the central imperialist bourgeoisie to politically expropriate the Orange caste was the way to exacerbate the contradiction, to remove one of the important barriers to the national liberation struggle of the Catholic population. The imperialists' assuming full and direct political control, according to this notion, was actually progressive. This concept led Comrade Purdie away from keeping the emphasis on the democratic demands of the oppressed people and most importantly on the demand for British withdrawal, from his revolutionary duty of constantly explaining that Britain has no right in Ireland and can perform no useful role there. Instead of constantly repeating "no trust in the imperialists, rely on your own strength," Comrade Purdie came around by the back door to encouraging illusions in the capacity of capitalism to play a progressive role. In this process, an underestimation of the revolutionary dynamic of democratic demands went hand in hand with an underestimation of the political power of mass struggle. The result was that the need to mobilize the masses was obscured by an eclectic notion of pitting one section of the ruling class against another.

In his underestimation of the political power of mass struggle, Comrade Purdie very clearly followed the line laid out by the leaders of the Ninth World Congress majority. In an article in the September 15, 1972, *Red Mole*, for instance, he says: "It is the armed resistance to the British Army which is the key to the development of the struggle. If it fails, British imperialism will smash the possibility of any independent political action by the nationalist minority."

This is almost an exact parallel of the main argument used by the IEC Majority Tendency to defend the guerrilla orientation in Latin America. For example, in "In Defence of Leninism; In Defence of the Fourth International," Comrade Germain says:

"Under the given circumstances, with the given social and economic instability in Latin America, the profound influence of the Cuban revolution on the vanguard of the mass movement, the decline of control of the traditional working class leaderships on that same vanguard, the explosive character of mass mobilizations which lead to rapid confrontations with the army, the emergence of the army as the mainstay of bourgeois power, not only materially but also politically, and its relative strength as opposed to the extreme fragility of all political formations of the ruling classes, a long period of gradual rise of mass struggles under conditions of relative (be it decaying) bourgeois democracy is extremely unlikely (except, as we said, in the case of Chile). The most likely variant is that a head-on collision between that mass movement and the army is unavoidable after a short period of emergence of mass explosions, a collision which could lead to a prolonged civil war, if the mass move-



ment isn't crushed by capitulation or disastrous defeats. Even if the enemy succeeds momentarily in establishing a military dictatorship, such a civil war could go on, temporarily take the form of guerrilla warfare, and help to overcome the lull in the mass struggles after the partial defeat. Whatever may be the various combinations of forms of struggle, it is necessary to tirelessly prepare the masses for such armed confrontations, which are unavoidable, so that the workers and poor peasants should not face the army without arms and without preparation." (Pages 4-5.)

For a very different country, quite a distance from Latin America, on the threshold of Europe in both the geographical and socio-political sense, Comrade Purdie came to the same conclusion: ". . . the armed resistance . . . is the key. . . . If it fails, British imperialism will smash the possibility of any independent political action by the nationalist minority."

This extension of the thesis of the Ninth World Congress Resolution on Latin America to a new context shows quite clearly that what is involved in the dispute over the guerrilla line is not a concrete analysis or the specific perspectives of socialist revolution in Latin America but a certain political conception. What the line of the Ninth World Congress Majority and now the IEC Majority Tendency represents, in fact, is an underestimation of the political impact of mass struggle and a tendency to reduce the area of conflict between the masses and the state to the arena of armed action alone and finally to replace a program for arming the masses with a strategy based on small commando groups isolated from the mass struggle. This inexorable logic is well illustrated by the IMG's reaction to the Bloody Sunday Massacre of January 31, 1972, in Derry.

### **The IEC Majority's Guerrillaist Rejection of Mass Struggle Extended to Europe**

The lesson of Derry, according to the IMG, was the "vulnerability" of mass struggle. In its February 7, 1972, issue *The Red Mole* argued:

"The massacre which took place in the Bogside on Sunday 30 January claiming the lives of thirteen Irishmen will bring home to many people, inside and outside Ireland, the importance of the IRA's role in the Six-Counties. It has been the existence of armed bodies of men engaged in the defense of the oppressed Catholic minority which has prevented the latter from being crushed by the British army. The main lessons of the massacre in the Bogside is that the Irish people have to defend themselves guns in hand against British imperialism. . . ."

"Since August 9th last year, British imperialism has been under a constant attack mounted by the oppressed Irish minority in the Six-Counties, but this attack has existed on two fronts: first the military struggle and secondly, the mass rents and rate strikes. These two fronts separated by the logistics of guerrilla warfare, were not only aimed at the same enemy, but were also linked politically through the mass popular demonstrations such as have been held over the last week, culminating in the 20,000 strong march in Derry.

"The demonstrations, unarmed and presenting an easy target, were the obvious choice to attempt and break the tightening noose of resistance. The Army had failed completely to inflict a decisive blow against the IRA.

The only way to defeat a rates and rents strike is by arresting thousands of householders. This was clearly impossible. The mass demonstrations provided the clearest target. Here lay the real hope of stemming the tide. Here one decisive blow could teach a terrible lesson to those who continued the resistance, because here the demonstrations were the largest and the most defiant; and because here a salient lesson could be taught to the whole Catholic population of Northern Ireland.

"What is this but a war? On one side is British imperialism and the Orange Order and on the other the majority of the Irish working class, spearheaded by the minority in the Six-counties and represented militarily by the IRA."

The massacre was designed to intimidate the Catholic population. But it was by no means the first use of massive and murderous violence against the minority by the British Army, as shown by the long list of Catholic victims before then, to say nothing of the massive internment raids and continual forays into Catholic neighborhoods that followed them. The British Army did not need a peaceful march to "tempt" it into using armed force against unarmed civilians. The resumption of the mass civil-rights marches despite this intimidation represented a crucial political test of strength. It threatened a decisive political defeat for the policy of repression. To this threat, the British Army responded by a calculated escalation. It took a political gamble. Who won out? According to Comrade Purdie, it should have been the British army. The logic of his argument is that this head-on political confrontation should have been avoided because the unarmed masses could not stand up to the British military.

The murder of thirteen unarmed demonstrators dealt the British government its greatest defeat so far in the Irish crisis. It touched off the first general strike in Ireland since 1913. It forced the Dublin government to take hostile steps against London for the first time in the conflict, although before this there were hundreds of violations of Twenty-Six County sovereignty by the British army, even threatening armed clashes between Twenty-Six County security forces and British units. It evoked panic from the organs of international imperialism. The *New York Times* called on the British government in obvious concern to do something to stop the crisis from deteriorating. And what is more, for a period of some months the British army pulled its troops out of the Catholic ghettos, something that the long months of the Provisional "military campaign" and the "very careful sniping" of the Officials had been completely unable to make it do.

Why did the Derry massacre have this effect? It was because world public opinion and the masses of the Irish people could understand the demands of the marchers and identify with them. The demonstrators were demanding democratic rights that clearly belonged to them. They were supported by the masses of the Catholic population, as was shown by their numbers and the breadth of the united front. There was no question of their trying to force their opinions on anyone by military conspiracy or the armed violence of small groups. It was precisely by stressing the democratic and peaceful character of the march that the maximum support could be achieved for the oppressed minority from the broad masses in

Ireland and throughout the world, who were far from understanding, as shown by their attitude and actions, the need for the revolutionary violence of commando groups. The fact that the peaceful, mass character of the march was evident to public opinion was what fundamentally explained the power of the protests against the obviously arbitrary and repressive terror of the British army. It was clear where the fault for the violence lay. It was clear who was using violence to suppress the democratic will of the people.

But the IMG drew a completely contrary conclusion:

"The reaction of the British press to Sunday's killings throws into sharp relief the need to make support for the IRA a central task of the solidarity movement in Britain. Running through many of the reports is the idea that the main responsibility for the killings lies with the IRA. Imperialism's use of internment, the presence and high concentration of British troops, the terror tactics and the murder, are all justified as being regrettable aspects of a necessary campaign against what it dubs a cancer within the Northern Catholic community—the IRA. A solidarity movement in Britain has to have as its main task the overcoming of such mystifications. This can only be achieved by showing that at this period the struggle of the IRA is the legitimate continuation of the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination. For militants who take the side of the oppressed minority of N. Ireland against the Stormont regime, the N. Irish State, and therefore British imperialism, it is vital to solidarise with the IRA, the only force capable of giving an immediate perspective of struggle against an enemy, which is determined to crush the resistance of the Irish people. A refusal to take up this position, in the present situation, means running the risk of falling into the arms of the British bourgeoisie, which is desperate only to smash the IRA before clinching a political deal with Lynch, Stormont, and the reformists in N. Ireland opposition who are prepared to sell out on the national question and accept less blatant but equally exploitative forms of imperialist domination." ("Avenge Derry," *Red Mole*, February 7.)

Thus, at a time when both the Provisional and Official IRA were trying to refute the lie that there were armed gunmen in the demonstration, that the massacre resulted from an armed clash between the IRA and the British army, the IMG saw its main task as defending the "armed action" of the IRA. This editorial started off in fact with the statement: "And after this massacre it is clearer still that the mass struggle in the North cannot be fought and defended without arms." Protests by people who did not understand this, it argued, would be of little value: "Yet of the many protests which Monday's *Morning Star* urges should 'flood Downing Street', few enough will help militants in Britain draw the necessary conclusions from this."

In an impressionistic and typically petty-bourgeois leftist style, the IMG sought to turn the propaganda of the bourgeois press upside down. Its notion of developing a "mass solidarity movement" to protest an armed attack by the British army on an unarmed, united-front march, was to hail the "armed action" of the IRA, "the armed vanguard of the Irish people."

The same notion is at work in the masquerades that have become typical not just of the IMG's but of the IEC

Majority Tendency's way of expressing solidarity with the struggle in Ireland. In the Glasgow march, the IMG tried to live up to the romantic image of the IRA projected by the bourgeois press. The Belgian conferences where Comrade Lawless was passed off as an IRA leader tried to produce an IRA that would live up to the thrilling pictures of the bourgeois media. In short, this is a pathetic petty-bourgeois attempt to frighten the bourgeoisie by imitating the scarecrows of its propaganda. Its effect is to both endanger and mock those who are actually engaged in the struggle.

What would have been the political outcome of the Derry massacre if there had actually been armed IRA men on the march or posted nearby? This question does not have to be answered by logic alone. No "hypotheses" are necessary. The whole course of the struggle in Northern Ireland since the spring of 1972 gives a concrete and irrefutable answer. With the death of the civil-rights movement, the IMG need not fear the possibility of unarmed masses confronting the British army. Since the resumption of the Provisional campaign in July, "armed struggle" has been the focus in Northern Ireland. In fact, technically the Provisional campaign is much improved, being bolstered by rockets and mortars whose effectiveness has been hailed in *The Red Mole*.

But what is the state of the situation now in Northern Ireland? A year ago, the murder of thirteen peaceful marchers by the British army touched off the sharpest crisis in the history of British imperialism in Ireland since the 1919-21 war of independence. Imperialist rule was shaken. Great masses of Southern Irish people rose up to defend their compatriots in the North. The full force of world public opinion was turned against the British rulers.

In contrast to that, since the resumption of the Provisional campaign on a wider scale the Northern people find themselves almost completely isolated. Not only that but the repression has extended to the South. The masses' fears of a seemingly uncontrolled and uncontrollable bombing campaign was so great that the explosion of a few bombs in Dublin, an obvious provocation, was enough to dissipate the opposition to draconian legislation against the militant nationalists in the South.

In the crisis that extended from the British army's murder of Cusack and Beattie in Derry city in July 1971 to the Derry massacre and direct rule, the bourgeois nationalists were on the defensive both North and South. The battered bourgeois nationalist party in the North was on the brink of being pushed into an impossible position, into either committing itself irreparably to revolutionary opposition to the Belfast parliament or exposing itself once and for all as a traitorous body. Today the bourgeois nationalists in the North have reconsolidated themselves as the political leadership of the Catholic minority. One year ago, the death of thirteen unarmed marchers brought worldwide protests. Since the resumption of the Provisional campaign, over a hundred people have been murdered by Orange assassins and by the British army's equivalent of the Green Berets, and there has not been a whisper of protest, not even in the South of Ireland. One year and a half ago, Britain's claim to being the "peacemaker," the arbiter in the North, was hopelessly compromised. After months of the Provisional



military campaign, this image has been restored, to such an extent that the politicians of the Dublin government can say publicly that they are opposed to a British withdrawal and get away with it. Until the resumption of the Provisional campaign, internment was a running sore in British politics and a grave international problem for the British government. Over the last year internment has continued and dozens of Irish liberation fighters have been sentenced to horrifying sentences by drumhead courts, and this has not aroused a ripple of international protest.

What has the IMG's policy of explaining the need for "solidarity with the armed struggle" done for this generation of Irish martyrs? All that it was capable of doing was giving the coup de grâce to an already declining support movement in Britain and defending the sterile tactics that led to this disaster.

### **The IMG Tail-Ends the Centrist Official IRA**

The failure of the IMG in the solidarity movement to help the fighters in Ireland, even its parasitic attitude and its mockery of them was, however, not its most serious error. In the wake of the Derry massacre, in the period of the mass protests when British imperialism was on the defensive, there was an opportunity for a qualitative leap in the revolutionary process in Ireland, there was an opportunity to build an all-Ireland mass revolutionary movement and possibly even arm the masses. The Southern government was reeling from the gigantic upsurge in the South. The entire Northern Catholic population was united in its hatred of the British and Belfast regimes. British imperialism was on the defensive. With proper direction, the mass movement could have forced the opening of the border, compelled the Dublin government to allow the passage of massive material aid to the North, and prevented the British government for a time at least from seriously interfering. But instead of pointing the way forward for the mass movement, the IMG tail-ended petty-bourgeois terrorist politics.

In accordance with its conception of itself as the "army of the people," as the "defenders" of the mass movement, the Official IRA responded to the Derry massacre by carrying out a terrorist action in Great Britain. It tried to bomb the officers' mess at the Aldershot paratroop base. The bankrupt centrism of the Official IRA was never more clearly revealed than by this incident. To compensate for its inability to offer a perspective to the mass movement, it resorted to a stunt designed to win the applause of the masses. Instead of understanding how to capitalize on the mass sentiment running in favor of the national liberation struggle, it squandered its advantage for the moral satisfaction of punishing the murders directly by killing a few officers in the same branch of the military. Although to give credit where credit is due, when they saw the negative effects of the operation, not having the benefit of the brilliant theory and conjunctural analysis enjoyed by the IMG as a result of its relations with the IEC Majority Tendency, the Official leadership recognized its error.

The Official leadership, however, was in a position to feel these effects directly. When the bomb attempt went wrong and killed several cleaning women and a Catholic chaplain, the tide of popular sentiment abruptly reversed itself, leaving the Officials high and dry. In the South

of Ireland, where tens of thousands of organized workers had marched in protest against the murders committed by the paratroopers and had burned the British embassy to the ground, the Officials found themselves totally isolated in the wake of Aldershot. No one came to their defense. Fortunately, they were able to embarrass the government by making it clear that the arrest of their leaders was aimed at suppressing the political activity of the organization, at making it unable to campaign in the Common Market referendum. This "reformist" democratic appeal saved them; they did not take this occasion to defend the "need for armed struggle."

This was the tack taken, however, by the IMG. An editorial in the February 28, 1972, *Red Mole* rushed to their "defense." "There must be no let up in the tempo of public agitation on Ireland, though the need for all meetings to be properly stewarded is now of prime importance. In this situation many will be tempted to retreat behind the cover of arguments of the form 'Marxism vs. Neo-anarchist Terrorism'. This must be resisted. In our society we are constantly experiencing the violence of the bourgeoisie. This occurs in covert—the violence of economic deprivation and social oppression—and overt—the open violence of the army and police forms. We deny them the right to use this violence. Every time they do as on Bloody Sunday in Derry, we will use it to show the rottenness of their system.

"For us violence is a response to their violence. The use of it is not a moral question. It is merely a tactic in our struggle—is a particular act of violence conducive to carrying the struggle forward or is it counter-productive?"

"No matter what criticism we might make of the tactics of the carrying out of this particular action the main fact is still that we unconditionally support the right of the IRA, or any other faction of the Republican population to carry on armed action aimed at destroying British rule in Ireland.

"The pacifists and liberals may weep and wring their hands with grief but even in their own moralising terms the just violence of the IRA is nothing compared to the centuries of British imperialist butchery in Ireland. In political terms as we have explained, the struggle of the IRA is in the direct interests of the British working class. The fact that a bad technical error or tactical mistake meant that unfortunately British army officers were not killed by the blast, does not in the slightest alter the political content of the struggle of the IRA.

"It is in this light that we must look at the Aldershot incident.

"Victory to the I.R.A."

The main point as to the historic responsibility for the use of violence was correct, of course. But in the concrete instance was this sufficient? Didn't the statement gloss over a tragic political error? The IMG, however, was quick to clarify its position. In the March 13, 1972, issue of *The Red Mole*, it said:

"Had Aldershot been a success (leaving aside the question of whether or not Officers were killed for the moment). [*The Red Mole* tended to give credence to an Official statement that the British were hiding their real casualties.—G.F.], there can be little doubt that the Northern minority,

and the rest of the Irish people would have been heartened. As it is the action spells out clearly to the British Army, the consequences of a future massacre like that at Derry. Had the IRA simply ignored the massacre it would have encouraged the attempts of British imperialism to frighten the mass movement off the streets. [I was in the living room of some key organizers of the "mass movement" when the news of Aldershot came over the TV. Their reaction at least was that it meant that the political advantage won by the Bloody Sunday protests had been squandered and that now those who died in the massacre had died in vain.—G.F.]. The new campaign also multiplies the contradictions for Stormont and Westminster; they had been making a lot of noise about the lower level of the Provisionals' campaign, although they were stretched taut in dealing with it. The Officials will make their military and propaganda situation more difficult."

The IMG hoped that the Aldershot bombing, plus some other actions of a similar type meant, to quote Comrade Purdie's pamphlet, that the Officials were being forced off their "conservative pedestal." The March 13 article continued:

"Aldershot, however, shows up some important contradictions in the Officials' policy. Firstly their repeated condemnations of Provisional actions, while being careful in selecting those which could be interpreted as being sectarian, nevertheless have tended to make generalised criticisms of the military struggle of the Provisionals which seem to counterpose a nonviolent response to the situation. An example of this is in the interview given to *Seven Days* by Cathal Goulding, where he criticises the Provisionals for escalating the struggle after internment: 'But the Provisionals escalated the struggle and that gave Faulkner the excuse he needed to continue internment.'

"Such statements had brought the Officials many a false friend recently, who praised their 'responsibility', and denounced the Provisionals as 'terrorists.' It is as well to lose such supporters, but by giving them a basis in the first place the Officials did not help to clarify the politics of the situation. And if they are serious about carrying through such a campaign it is as well to prepare the Irish people for it in advance; they have done the reverse. It is as well also not to have organisations which are well-known to be heavily under Official influence, such as the NICRA, denouncing the bombing (see *Morning Star*, 23rd February).

"These contradictions, which can all be explained in terms of 'tactics,' in reality flow from the basic contradictions within Official policy, their attitude towards Stormont. Still insisting, after internment, after Derry, that Stormont can be reformed, they are propelled into reformist and gradualist politics. At the present conjuncture the mass demonstrations do have a revolutionary potential, since they increase the contradictions of the Unionists and British imperialism; but not being placed in the context of a policy which tries to smash Stormont, their line of development is extremely limited.

"But the Officials are still Republicans, they still come from the physical force tradition [which Comrade Purdie now no longer considered "backward"—G.F.]. It is impossible for them to stand idly by while the British Army tries to crush the minority in the North; retaliatory ac-

tion was necessary, and has been taken. This, however, merely opens up more contradictions, for such a campaign will have very serious consequences for Stormont. If it is carried on for an extended period it could well lead to the collapse of Stormont, and if the alternative is not to be direct rule it is necessary to prepare the ground work for a peoples' alternative now.

"It will be inevitable too that such a basic contradiction will lead to disagreements within the Officials; one section will try to resolve the contradiction by bringing the military policy into line with the reformist political policy, and another will try to change the political line. This is not the best internal situation with which to sustain a military campaign.

"Nevertheless we pledge our continued solidarity with the struggle now going on, and will renew our attempts to build a principled solidarity movement in Britain, one which does not hesitate to say: *VICTORY TO THE IRA!*"

The Official IRA did not follow the IMG's friendly advice. When the pattern of "retaliatory" actions isolated them and brought them to the brink of destruction, they declared the cease-fire that was such a disappointment to the IMG and their continental cothinkers.

But if the Officials let down the IMG, there were still the Provisionals, whose military prowess *The Red Mole* never failed to praise, although at times expressing some disquiet about their political conceptions. In the March 13 article, a hope expressed by Comrade Purdie was that the Officials might wage a more political terrorist campaign than the Provisionals:

"Until the beginning of this year the main core of the military struggle had been carried on by the Provisionals, being cast in the traditional Republican mould, they have seen themselves, fighting another army. This dictated sniping at soldiers, and attacking military installations and while they did give their campaign a political edge by attempting to bomb life in Belfast to a standstill, this has not been achieved and has more and more taken the form of random actions."

### The IMG Tail-Ends the Provisionals' Terrorist Course

On March 21, one of these "random actions" took place in Donegall Street, one of the main thoroughfares of Belfast. A bomb was planted in the street itself, and then the Provisionals apparently called the British army, warning them of the impending blast. Forcing the occupation forces to clear this heavily trafficked street while they searched for the bomb would have been a significant contribution to the campaign to "bomb life in Belfast to a standstill." The British, however, did not cooperate. And it appears that they actually herded the crowd into the area where the bomb was expected to explode. When the event occurred, television sets throughout Europe and America showed British soldiers rushing to the aid of wounded and maimed civilians, including children, who were allegedly struck down by the "gunmen" of the Provisional IRA. Sanctimonious speeches by "shocked" British officers filled the airwaves.

There was something very wrong politically with this type of action. The concept of a military campaign divorced from the mass struggle, however, led inevitably to such incidents. The Provisionals' actions were consis-

tent with their political concepts, and they did not hesitate to take responsibility for this action and to carry out others like it later on. It was the IMG that was inconsistent.

After all, Comrade Purdie wrote in his pamphlet published just a few months before the Donegall Street bombing:

"It soon became clear that the British Army faced an urban guerrilla war, a war which was probably tougher than the Black & Tan war and one of the most sophisticated guerrilla campaigns that has ever been seen. Within a few months the Army was totally incapable of making any progress, the audacity of the IRA volunteers knew no bounds, they pulled off coup after dazzling coup, while the Crown forces fumed impotently." (p. 5).

In his article in the February 28 *Red Mole*, entitled "Ireland—Seize the Time," Comrade Purdie did criticize the militarist conceptions of the Provisionals:

"The chief flaw in the thinking of the Provisionals is the old Republican one; because they place the military struggle to expell British imperialism from the North on a pedestal, they underestimate the importance of political mobilisation either of the Northern minority, or the southern masses."

But since Comrade Purdie also elevated "armed struggle" to a special position, calling it the "key" to the situation, such criticisms of the Provisional strategy became more and more overshadowed by praise for their guerrilla technique.

In an article in the July 10, 1972, *Red Mole*, Comrades Purdie and Lawless wrote: "The weaknesses of the Provisionals should not blind anyone to the importance of what they have been able to achieve. They have built up the most effective military resistance to British imperialism seen in Ireland since the Black and Tan war; never for more than fifty years has the British Army faced an adversary so formidable as the Provisional IRA.

"We refuse to criticise them for their military strategy; we do not accept that the bombing campaign was sectarian, and we despise those on the British left who have echoed these slanders. The targets of the campaign were on the one hand the British and Six County state forces, and on the other hand the business interests, and the institutions of British imperialism in Ireland. The facts have been confused because bombs set off by the British SAS and Orange fanatics have been attributed to the Provisionals. The most common accusation is that the Provos have bombed protestant pubs and factories. First they have not bombed any pubs because they were used by protestants but for military and/or security reasons, and second they have bombed factories, which represented British investments. That they should directly affect mostly protestant workers in this way reflects the sectarian employment policy of the state, which the bombs were trying to smash."

To be sure, Comrades Purdie and Lawless pointed to the political weaknesses of the Provisionals, their lack of a program and socialist leadership. In particular they criticized the Provisionals' concept that they had a mandate from the first revolutionary government (1919) to carry out whatever actions they deemed necessary. Comrades Purdie and Lawless stressed that the Provisionals

had to develop structures of "direct democracy" that could authorise them to carry out such military and other actions. But, having put the cart before the horse, they were in a rather awkward position to make such suggestions. Since they hailed the military campaign that was being carried out by a "secret army" in isolation from mass struggles or control, calling it the "key" to the situation and the main thing responsible for the failure of the imperialists to achieve their strategic ends, weren't their complaints about the Provisionals' political weaknesses really rather secondary?

When the Provisionals repeated the mistake of the Donegall Street bombing on a grand scale in the Bloody Friday bombings of July 21, 1972, the IMG's criticism was again very ambiguous. In the July 29 *Red Mole*, Comrade Lawless wrote:

"Taking advantage of the casualties, Whitelaw then launched his psychological warfare blitz to panic all other Republican, nationalist and socialist tendencies into condemnation of the Provisionals.

"From this condemnation the British propaganda machine hopes to push them into at least neutrality, while Whitelaw 'destroys the IRA's capability'. From recent statements from the Official Republican movement, Whitelaw has reason to be hopeful on this score.

"No one must fall for this. A defeat for the Provos would not be a defeat for the Provos alone. If Whitelaw succeeds against the Provos he will take on all other tendencies one by one." (Emphasis in original.)

Comrade Lawless's comment was rather one-sided. The mistake of the Provisionals had its effect on the masses. The attitude of the other tendencies could not alter that. They of course had a duty to defend the Provisionals, to explain why they did what they did. But they could not help the Provisionals by endorsing their error. The best way they could help the Provisionals was by explaining very clearly why such tactics were wrong. It was all very well, moreover, to explain that many of the bombings were provocations and that the British army deliberately disregarded warnings. But the IMG did not draw the political conclusions from this. That is, that such acts could easily be distorted and manipulated by the British; they did not help to organize and educate the masses, they confused and disorganized them. They were, in short, terrorist acts, and it was the duty of Marxists to point out why they were ineffective.

The results of "Bloody Friday" were quick in coming. Confused and disoriented by the seemingly senseless and bloody bombings, the Catholic population accepted British occupation of the "no go areas." Key neighborhoods that had been kept free of the repressive forces for months, that had served as political focuses and symbols of the resistance as well as refuges for victims of political persecution, were occupied without resistance. Once the mass mobilization and the political pressures that had kept the British army out were dissipated by the bombings, the "guerrillas" were no obstacle to the army moving in. Derry in particular, which had been the nerve center and political laboratory of the Northern resistance, the symbol of its hopes, where the Catholic population lived in freedom behind the barricades during the greater part of the crisis, fell under crushing military occupation. There was only a feeble glimmer of the spirit and

unity that had defeated the British army in the aftermath of the internment raids.

But instead of explaining the gravity of this defeat and its causes, the IMG minimized it.

"The invasion was hardly a famous victory, and certainly not a military defeat for the IRA. The struggle may have been pushed back by the elimination of the Free Areas, but it will continue in other forms. The Free Areas were important to the military struggle but the IRA was able to carry out quite effective military action before they were set up, and will continue to do so." (Cf. Comrade Purdie's article in the August 7, 1972, issue of *The Red Mole*.)

Why was the occupation of the Free Areas not a victory for the British Army? Because the military was forced to carry out repression.

"But in the long run Britain cannot win. Whitelaw's initiative was the nearest they have got yet to imposing a solution, and having run that policy down with their own tanks the Heath government can face only a mounting crisis as the resentment of the minority is translated into a new round of the struggle against the Army of occupation."

Comrade Purdie did not seem to realize that repression does not always have the effect solely of stirring resentment. The fact that the British army was able to accomplish this occupation without sparking mass resistance was a sign that they had achieved a significant victory over the mass movement. But, apparently, Comrade Purdie was not very interested in that. "It is useless to make abstract condemnations of 'terrorism' and to declare in solemn tones that terrorism cannot achieve anything. The fact is that the Provisionals' bombing campaign was as important as their offensive against the British Army, and the resistance of the masses in bringing down Stormont.

"Nevertheless, it is clear that the bombings in Belfast were used by the British for their own ends, and to their own advantage. The advantages which they did gain are very limited, but for the purpose of the invasion important. This illustrates that while the present lines of battle remained unchanged even the most developed military technique can rebound politically on the IRA [! — G.F.] Without a solution of the problems of how to escalate the struggle in the North into an all-Ireland struggle which combines the completion of the national with the working class revolution the Provos will be balked in similar ways in the future."

That is, the Provisionals' strategy was fine; their military technique was one of "the most developed." But, "alas," they lacked a strategy for extending the struggle to the South. Comrade Purdie did not seem to realize that the "bombing campaign" he praised had the effect of alienating the masses of the Southern population from the struggle in the North and was thus the exact opposite of what was needed to "extend the battle lines." He was the one trapped in a contradiction, not the Provisionals. Despite his trying to straddle the fence, according to a method perhaps learned from the IEC Majority Tendency's resolution on Latin America, his weight came down fundamentally on the side of terrorism.

The IMG, moreover, was apparently anxious to cash in on the popularity that the Provisionals had won in some circles of the young left by their terrorist actions.

In the October 30, 1972, issue of *The Red Mole*, they printed an interview, without comment, with Sean Mac Stiofain and Joe Cahill, two Provisional leaders who would certainly have been characterized by *The Red Mole* in 1970 as "conservatives." According to the interview, they said: "It is said that we have connections with the ruling circles in the South. I would then like to know why, if this connection still exists (certainly, who would have refused money and arms, when the battle began?), Lynch threw us into prison, and left the Official 'Marxists' in peace? The repression against us, coordinated between London and Belfast, gets worse every day. Heath gave Lynch a list of people who had to be put out of the way. The first victim was Francis MacGuigan, the only guerrilla fighter ever to have escaped from Long Kesh, arrested the other day with two comrades. The fact is that the Dublin government is much more afraid of us than of the Official IRA opportunists, who unfortunately have the support of a lot of marxists, even sincere marxists, abroad, while the revolutionary groups, particularly the Fourth International, are all on our side. It is we who are fighting an armed struggle against capitalism, against clerical conservatism, against the manipulation of our economy by foreign capital, against their control of the means of distribution and production, which deprives through wage slavery, the worker of the wealth which he produces."

This interview was supposed to have been given in Italy. Such sentiments have not been expressed by Sean Mac Stiofain and Joe Cahill in interviews with the Irish, British, or American press. But the interview does raise the question: Does the IMG believe that the extent of a group's revolutionary determination and the threat it represents to the system is determined by the degree of repression to which it is subjected? It is notable that although the Provisionals continue to observe the principle of not recognizing the courts and thus put themselves in a position of suffering automatic jail sentences, a principle that Comrade Purdie noted in 1970 resulted in needless casualties, *The Red Mole* has not tried to persuade them to abandon this attitude.

Furthermore, the IMG has continued its "explanations" of the bombing technique:

"The Provisional bombing campaign has been almost uniformly misunderstood or misrepresented. So-called 'Marxists' have sternly denounced 'terrorism' which they have defined in a quite un-Marxist way as a question of *military technique*, rather than as a question of the *political relationship between military action and the masses*. [Is this a "synthetic and elliptical phrase"? Its meaning is not exactly clear. — G.F.]

"The bombing campaign had two main purposes. Firstly, it was designed to seriously disrupt commercial life in the main cities. In turn this had two subsidiary purposes: to bring pressure to bear on the British government; and simultaneously to break up the foundations of the Six County state. It was secondly an important defensive measure: the forces in the centre of the cities, forces which could have been used in the period before Operation Motorman to saturate the Catholic ghettos. The methods now being used in these areas are an indication of what this would have meant. Whole populations are constantly under surveillance by the Army, constantly threatened with arrest, and/or harassment. This



seriously undermines their ability to engage in political resistance. Fortunately the Army has not yet been able to totally crush the people *but if they were able to dispose of large enough forces they would*. By obliging the Army to protect the city centres the Provisional IRA contributes directly to the possibility of mass political opposition. Thus the bombing campaign is not terrorist [! — G.F.]

"If we draw up a balance sheet, it shows a very heavy balance on the positive side. The campaign helped to maintain the free areas for much longer than they would otherwise have existed, by pinning down large numbers of troops." (*The Red Mole*, November 27, 1972.)

Thus, there is nothing basically wrong with the Provisionals' tactics, according to the IMG, and that is essentially the message the Provisionals' supporters have gotten. "Mr. Tariq Ali, the well-known theorist of revolution, who arrived in Dublin for a brief visit told the Commerce and Economics Society in U. C. D. [University College Dublin] that he supports the Provisional IRA's bombing campaign in the North," the *Irish People*, the New York weekly that reflects the views of the American Provisional support group, reported in its February 10, 1973 issue. What this amounts to is uncritical support for the political conceptions of the Provisionals, from which their tactics flow.

### The IMG Covers Up the Failure of Terrorism

In order to maintain this effectively uncritical support of the Provisionals' strategy, the IMG has been forced to completely distort the course of events in the North. This method is illustrated in the passage quoted above. If the bombings served to draw off the troops from the ghettos, how could the ghettos be occupied almost immediately after the largest Provisional bombing campaign of the crisis? If the bombing campaign "contributes directly to the possibility of mass political opposition," why has the mass movement disappeared as the bombing campaign escalated, as was shown by the lack of massive passive resistance to the occupation in contrast to the response to the internment raids? The statement that the repression the ghetto dwellers are now suffering shows what would have happened if the bombings had not kept the troops off is completely dishonest and confusionist (and fundamentally an apology for the terrorism of the Provisionals). The fact is that the repression they are suffering comes in the wake of the most ambitious Provisional offensive in the history of the crisis. These arguments contradict even Comrade Purdie's article in the August 7 *Red Mole*, which said ". . . it is clear that the bombings in Belfast were used by the British for their own ends, and to their own advantage. The advantages which they did gain are very limited, but for the purpose of the invasion important." The logic of adaptation is inexorable, and there is no end to it if you do not break fundamentally with this method.

The same method has led the IMG to deny the steady deterioration of the situation in Northern Ireland in the last year. Every new setback is regarded as the contradictory effect of a victory. An excellent example of this kind of "dialectics" is to be found in an editorial in the November 27, 1972 *Red Mole*:

"The probability that Mac Stiofain will receive a two year sentence should not be seen as the main problem which is revealed by his arrest. Despite his enormous

military ability, his arrest alone will not break the campaign in the North. The real problem is the continued weakness of the struggle in the South. The purpose of Whitelaw's ramblings on the 'Irish Dimension' in his Green Paper, is now revealed. Unable to defeat the struggle in the Six Counties, British Imperialism is now going over to an *all-Ireland* offensive. And in return for meaningless promises of the Green Paper, Fianna Fail is acting as its main agent. Never before has the crucial importance of an all-Ireland struggle by the Irish republicans and socialists been shown so starkly."

In the first place, this argument runs somewhat counter to the previous chiding of the Officials for not realizing that the struggle in Ireland has been essentially one and that you cannot divide the North and the South. The Officials, as a result of their populist concepts, have tended to see the problem as building up the struggle to the same level in both areas. They have failed to see that the colonial and neocolonial system in Ireland form an integrated whole in which both the British government and the native bourgeois forces respond on a nationwide basis to threats arising anywhere in the country. At the same time, paradoxically they fail to grasp fully the political contradictions that arise from the different political pressures on these forces and that disrupt their cooperation. That is, their conception is incomplete and rather static. But in his attempt to present the Lynch government's offensive as the result of a flanking maneuver by a British regime, thwarted by the invincible Provisional campaign, the author of this article reinforced this type of confusion.

Imperialism has always had an "all-Ireland" strategy, as shown by its pressures on the Lynch government from the start of the crisis. What prevented repression previously in the South was the support for the struggle in the North, and what permitted Lynch to move against the Provisionals was precisely the ebbing of that sentiment as a result of the political confusion caused to an important degree by the Provisionals' bombing campaign. This decline in support in the South, moreover, was only a magnified reflection of a decline in support for militant struggle in the North deriving fundamentally from the same causes. As an apologist for "armed struggle," in reality, petty-bourgeois terrorism, the writer of *The Red Mole* editorial cannot recognise this fact, and evidently was forced to suck a "new conjuncture" out of his thumb to explain the move toward repression in the Twenty-Six Counties.

### Adaptation Leads to Eclecticism and Confusion

In its analysis of the Irish situation, in fact, *The Red Mole* goes in rather heavily for involved speculation about the strategy of the British government in this or that conjuncture. This tendency brought a complaint from the writer of the earlier mentioned document entitled "How to Lead from Behind."

"We have tended to concentrate unduly on the analysis of British Government and Military strategy, to the detriment of broader issues where there is a real need to [convey] correct ideas to our members-periphery-readers. Mole readers get to know about the military situation in Belfast, the morale in the Army, etc. but slightly less on the question of 'terrorism', the question of working class unity



in Ireland, loyalist 'socialism', etc. There has been a definite lack of articles which set out to explain in a clear and systematic way some of the key political issues on which there tends to be confusion, even inside the Left. For instance — Terrorism, is the Provo bombing campaign terrorism? why not? what is the marxist attitude to terrorism? to guerrilla warfare?"

There does seem to have been something of a lack of clear consistent analysis of the main trends in the development of the situation. Some "conjunctural" analyses such as the following from the July 29, 1972, *Red Mole* ("Tories New Course in Ireland" by Gery Lawless) indicate that the author of "How to Lead from Behind" had grounds for complaint:

"In entering this new phase we must realise that this will in many ways be the most dangerous phase of the national liberation struggle. Before we have had to face either the carrot or the stick. In the coming period the policy will be the carrot *and* the stick, thus increasing the tendency to division within the anti-imperialist ranks, both in Britain and Ireland.

"The *Irish Times* in an article by the usually well informed London Editor, Jim Downey, made it clear that Whitelaw is anxious for a return to the cease fire, and the attitude of Republican leaders, in Dublin and elsewhere, shows that the Provos would be willing for another bi-lateral cease fire.

"With the final vote on the Common Market Bill out of the way, Whitelaw and those elements in the cabinet which represent manufacturing capitalist interests (Europeans) are now trying to summon up the courage to take on the Orange ultras and their backers in the Tory Party, the old guard 'Commonwealthers'. But before they do this, they must clear from their flanks the military lobby represented by General Tuzo, and behind him the Defence Minister, Peter Carrington.

"Whitelaw and the 'Europeans' blame the ultra-Orange backlash for the break down in the truce, and recognise that implicitly or explicitly, any new bi-lateral cease fire, to be acceptable to the Provos, will have to be based on a willingness on their part to call the Orange bluff. While being frightened of this possibility, they are haunted by another spectre—the spectre of a Southern backlash. They fear that a renewal of the confrontation with the Catholic population of the North will lead to other Derry massacres, without the sacrificial lamb of a British Embassy in Dublin to appease Southern anger.

"Their tactics are to wark for a cease fire as early as possible, but first to appease the military lobby they want to inflict what is known in British Army circles as a 'bloody nose' on the IRA. What this quaint English euphemism means is, a new cease fire in which the British Army can interpret the terms, where Whitelaw, if the necessity again arise, can squeeze the Catholics to make room for the granting of concessions to the Orange ultras, without the danger of another Lenadoon.

"Although Republican leaders are playing their cards close to their chests, informed sources close to the leadership make it clear that whatever the other weaknesses of the movement, in this case they have taken Whitelaw's measure and are determined that any new bi-lateral cease fire will *not* be one which is imposed on them in the after-

math of a British victory."

Comrade Lawless is, of course, rather new to the IMG but his articles are an important part of the *Red Mole's* Irish coverage and similar jumbled speculations could be found in articles by other IMG writers. The basic problem is the method apparently countenanced or even encouraged by *The Red Mole* editors. It is an impressionist and centrist method that cannot clarify any development over the long run but ends up in complete confusion. It cannot educate anyone—not the fighters in Ireland or the militants of the IMG. In the long run all these pretentious formulations and involved speculations only come down to the notion: if the IRA keep fighting long enough and if they get the right kind of equipment, something has to give. That is, it leads to capitulation to the most backward aspects of the military conspiratorial tradition in Ireland.

It is not impossible that the Provisionals will achieve successes with their present line. Adventures are not always unsuccessful. This is one of the reasons some people always keep hoping. But a consistent revolutionary line cannot be erected on such a basis. Furthermore, the IMG leaders seem entranced by the concept of military action, armed struggle, to the extent that they do not realise that armed action like any other activity, if it is not guided by a revolutionary program, can be co-opted by the system. "Military reformism" in fact has been one of the main threads in the history of the IRA. The fact that it was organized as a "secret army" did not prevent the IRA from being drawn into supporting De Valera in the South or into a symbiotic relationship with the Nationalist party in the North. And most of the people I have talked to in Belfast and Derry did not support the Provisional campaign on the basis of any hope in revolutionary victory. One Provisional leader thought it could force the British to turn the peace-keeping over to the U.N. Others hoped it would "make the government sit up and take notice."

## Supporting Guerrillaism Leads to Supporting Blanquist Program

Inevitably, moreover, the IMG support for the Provisionals' actions led to supporting their political conceptions. In an article in the January 10, 1972, *Red Mole*, Comrade Purdie chided the Officials in these terms:

"The Provisionals also have a clear policy embodied in the work they are doing to build Dail Uladh and Dail Chonnacht, which are an attempt to create an alternative administration to, not only Stormont, but Leinster House [the Dublin parliament], since Dail Uladh involves the three counties of Ulster which are within the Free State; and the creation of Dail Chonnacht for the Province of Connaught, which includes the oppressed Irish speaking minority [Actually the Irish-speaking minority in Ulster, i.e., Donegal, is almost as numerous as the main Gaelic community in Connaught, that is, in Galway.—G.F.]. The fact that the Provisionals pose these assemblies 'from the top' and that they provide no clear way for linking them to the mass of the people [Comrade Purdie did recognise apparently that this represented something of a problem.—G.F.] does not detract from the fact that the building of local civil resistance committees could create

the content which would bring life to the forms of Dail Uladh. The backwardness of the leadership of the Provisionals on political questions, and their lack of understanding of what socialism means could hold back developments, but this is all the more reason for those who do have a better understanding to participate in the building of the civil resistance movement."

The regional parliament idea of the Provisionals was only a reflection of their traditional Blanquist approach to government formulas. When the Fenian movement originated more than a hundred years ago, one of the first things it did was set up a government of the republic of Ireland "now virtually established." This "government" did not arise out of a struggle or the process of the masses coming to rule themselves. It was simply an abstract formula to provide a political umbrella for the military struggle. As for the Provisionals' assemblies, they were hardly more than publicity stunts, designed at most to show that they really did have a "political" program.

The important thing, Comrade Purdie says in another article, is where these formulas could have led the Provisionals. That is precisely the problem. They led them in the wrong direction. They did not lead them in the direction of understanding that they had to base themselves on the self-organisation of the masses. For revolutionists, the governmental formula for popular power arises out of the specific conditions of the mass mobilization and its demands, out of the revolutionary process. It is not some abstract formula decided on from above and then given "popular content." Furthermore, the conception of Dail Uladh was fundamentally false in another regard. It was based on the premise that in Ulster as a whole, Catholics and Protestants are roughly equal in numbers and that therefore a government based on the province as a whole would be acceptable to both communities. This notion represented a complete misunderstanding of the caste mentality of the Protestants and did not contribute one iota to illuminating this key question. It was positively dangerous in the sense that it represented an accommodation to the Unionist propaganda myth of some special, separate character of the province of Ulster.

There was absolutely no basis in the ongoing struggle for such a formula. The struggle in the North had only sporadic reflections in the border counties. Such reflections moreover were not confined to the three counties of Ulster under the Dublin government but were stronger if anything in Louth, which is in Leinster. In all, the conception was a totally formal one and led away from and not toward a revolutionary political alternative for the struggle in the North.

It was particularly aberrant to present this formula to the Officials, who, whatever their other weaknesses, did understand that a revolutionary government had to be based on the mobilized people and arise out of their struggle. They attempted to develop this locally but lacked the concept of general governmental formulas. They remained populists and centrists. But after this example of abject confusion and accommodation to paleorepublicanism, it is not very likely that the Officials would have looked to the IMG for more advanced political ideas.

Thus, although it has certainly utilized to the fullest the "advanced theory" derived from the "turn" at the Ninth

World Congress—Comrade Lawless in particular seems to have appreciated the "higher level" theoretical justification for an orientation he has long maintained—the IMG has failed completely to project either a clear and effective line for the support movement in Britain or for the struggle in Ireland. Its adaptations have prevented it from offering any useful Marxist education to its members or to any other forces, and have led finally to abject confusion. This failure, moreover, has been extended directly to Ireland through the IMG's role in forming and educating the Trotskyist nucleus there.

## The 'Fusion Between Marxism and Republicanism'

Just as the IMG's turning to the republican fringe represented by Saor Eire was a key bridge in its development of a guerrillaist orientation for Ireland, its involvement with this organization in Ireland was central to its concept of developing an Irish Trotskyist organization. The leader of the Irish nucleus, Peter Graham, became very deeply involved with Saor Eire when he returned to Ireland in the summer of 1971 after spending a year working with the IMG in London. Around the time Graham returned to Dublin, *The Red Mole* ran the manifesto of Saor Eire, which was introduced in the following terms:

"Now we have received the following manifesto, in which Saor Eire explain their policies and methods of struggle. We publish it in the belief that it is an important contribution to the discussion on the way forward for the Irish revolution."

This manifesto was published nowhere else but in *The Red Mole*. However, it must have attracted special attention from *The Red Mole's* readers. The conceptions outlined in it were remarkably similar to those of the ERP in Argentina, which by then was being presented in the British Trotskyist paper as an inspiring example. This is how Saor Eire defined its role:

"Based on the premise of the necessity for armed struggle and the need to mobilize the masses of workers, small farmers and students, an overall strategy and programme must be developed. To limit the struggle to the confines of purely political parties and groupings is to relegate it to a process of endless discussions, ineffective motions, resolutions and debates and to sidetrack it into a political whirlpool. There are enough parties and groups in existence at the moment who claim for themselves the leadership of the common struggle. It will not help to create another such organization. Action will test the validity of each distinct political philosophy and it is only in action that leadership will be developed. New strategies and tactics must be developed for the Irish situation. Rural guerrilla warfare in relation to Irish topography and modern technological developments must be placed in its proper context and more emphasis placed on the urban guerrilla. Sabotage throughout the country, action by small independent groups and political work among the masses must be the order of the day. Separate revolutionary groupings must be formed to confuse the police and in the interests of security. The banks and the State have all the resources, finance and armaments, to supply these groups and at a later stage a guerrilla front can be created.

"Since our inception we have strove to inject a new

concept of political action into the blood stream of Irish revolutionary politics. This concept of revolutionary struggle, new in the sense that tactically and strategically it has not been tried in Ireland during the present epoch, is as old in essence as the struggle against British Imperialism itself. The idea of the National Revolution in 1916 was basically built around the belief that a small group of armed men could, by making what Pearce called a blood sacrifice, act as a detonator for the initiation of the fight for national liberation. None of the leaders of Easter Week 1916 believed that their action, taken in isolation from the rest of the country and surrounded by an apathetic populace would in itself have the immediate effect of freeing Ireland. What they achieved was a sowing of the seed which blossomed two years later into the War of Independence. Their action was a defeat militarily, but a success in that it acted as a detonator for a popular explosion. All actions in present day Irish politics should be viewed in that light."

From the standpoint of *The Red Mole* editors, the Saor Eire militants were undoubtedly refreshingly free from any "spontaneist" or "massist" illusions:

"What is needed is a movement that is one step ahead but still in contact with the people and not a party which ends tail-ending the mass movement at its present stage of development. The objective conditions for a revolution must not be waited upon but must be created from the material already existing. The inability or unwillingness of any party or group and their lack of success in this field has made it imperative to create small armed groupings who can take an active part in creating these necessary conditions. There are sufficient diverse political groupings in existence at the moment and the creation of one more will only lend further to the confusion already existing. Thus such a movement must draw for its support and manpower on these same bodies and carry the struggle to a higher plane. There is no contradiction between the building of armed groups and the building of the mass movement. Such actions as they will carry out whether they be armed insurrection in some labour dispute, the redressing of a social evil, or attacks on State property or its servants, will show to the people that there is in existence the means and the method to combat and defeat a bureaucratic capitalist state. Such actions will focus the attention of the people on the wrongs and the evils that exist in our society and will expose the dictatorial character of the state machine in its unwillingness to abrogate its privileges.

"In theory at least Republicanism is nearer to this correct tactical approach than the more developed Socialist groupings. It is not the quantity of Marx digested that makes a revolutionary but the ability to prepare to take part in and make the revolution that matters. Some Socialist groupings, for various subjective reasons [lack of physical courage and devotion, one presumes—G.F.], hold to the belief that the mass of the people must be politically conscious and that the objective conditions must be ripe before we start to make this revolution. Such attitudes will condemn them to endless discussions, the continual analysis of actions after the event [i.e., "commentary politics"—G.F.] and eventually to political extinction."

If the introduction to this statement was not enough to recommend this call to arms to *Red Mole* enthusiasts, the phoenix rising out of the flames that was superimposed

over the manifesto must certainly have conveyed the message.

The Saor Eire manifesto was very much appreciated by Comrade Nathan Weinstock who quoted it favorably in his analysis of the Irish situation published in *La Gauche and Rouge*:

"Alongside these two mass currents [the Officials and Provisionals] who are unquestionably leading the military resistance against the British presence in Ulster at this time, there are other smaller groups such as Saor Eire, a militant republican and socialist formation that has engaged in a series of armed expropriations of Irish banks to collect the funds necessary to supply the Northern militants. A passage of their manifesto very correctly points out how the movements that exist must be evaluated: 'It is not the quantity of Marx digested that makes a revolutionary but the ability to prepare to take part in and make the revolution.'" (*La Gauche*, September 24, 1971; *Rouge* October 2, 1971.)

The Saor Eire manifesto does seem to have had the merit of defining the attitude the IMG developed toward the Officials more clearly than any of its statements ever did: "These so called 'left wingers' are more reactionary than any so called 'right wingers' they might have posed. For though they may indulge in 'socialist' phrasemongering they have divested the Republican Movement of its revolutionary potential by dismantling and undermining its armed wing."

The importance that the IMG gave Saor Eire is shown by Comrade Purdie's treatment of it in his pamphlet *Ireland Unfree*: "But the important change since Connolly's day is that the possibility exists for Republicanism to base itself much more firmly on the working class, and to integrate working class revolutionary ideas—Marxism—into its thinking. *A fusion between revolutionary Marxism and Republicanism is the future for the Irish revolutionary movement.*" (Page 37, emphasis in original.)

By this concept of "fusion" between Marxism and the (no longer backward) ideology of "physical force," Comrade Purdie was apparently extending the concept voiced in the basic programmatic document of the PRT (Combattiente) in Argentina, "The Only Road to Workers Power and Socialism":

"It is not by accident that the Trotskyist movement, from the viewpoint of the overall perspective for the world and continental class struggle, has arrived at important judgments and conclusions, broadening in this way the vision of revolutionaries.

"Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement have also contributed—creatively—to Marxism an analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy and developed from this a very clear theory of the nature and role of bureaucratic formations.

"Mao and Maoism applied Leninism to the theory and practice of the seizure of power, which is nothing other than applying revolutionary Marxism to the circumstances of a particular country with the perspective of attaining workers power. That is the 'concrete analysis of concrete situations' which Lenin defined as 'the very essence of Marxism,' the creative application of revolutionary theory to the concrete reality of a revolution which had been thoroughly studied, understood and fought for. Mao himself said, 'the fusion of the general truth of Marxism with

the concrete practice of the Chinese Revolution.'

"Mao and Maoism creatively applied and developed Marxism-Leninism in the revolutionary people's war theory. That is, the need for a revolutionary army which can defeat the counterrevolutionary army; the need to build this army in the rural areas through a prolonged process during which the revolutionary forces grow from small to large, from weak to strong, while the reactionary forces go from large to small, from strong to weak. This produces a qualitative step forward to a general insurrection when the revolutionary forces have gained the greater strength.

"Both Trotskyism and Maoism have mutually ignored each other's contributions. What is more, some Trotskyists still believe Maoism to be a part of Stalinism and consequently a counterrevolutionary current. Maoism, for its part, continues to believe that Trotskyism is a movement of capitalist and imperialist *agents provocateurs*. Today the principal theoretical task of revolutionary Marxists is to fuse the main contributions of Trotskyism and Maoism into a higher unity which would prove to be a real return to Leninism. The development of the world revolution leads inevitably to this goal as is indicated by the unilateral advances of Maoism toward the assimilation of Trotskyism (the break with the Soviet bureaucracy, the cultural revolution); the moves of Trotskyism toward incorporating Maoist contributions (the theory of revolutionary war) and, above all, the efforts of the Cuban leadership to achieve this superior unity." ("The Only Road to Workers Power and Socialism," *International Information Bulletin*, October 1972, no. 4, p. 8.)

In Ireland, this "fusion" between the correct general ideas and the "concrete" strategy of struggling for power was illustrated, according to Comrade Purdie, by Saor Eire:

"Alongside the Officials and Provisionals exists a much smaller group which represents just such a fusion between Marxism and Republicanism — Saor Eire (Free Ireland). SE was formed out of two distinct strands, a group of volunteers who left the IRA during the period of politicisation (they reacted against the rundown of military activity, and the influence of the Wolfe Tone Society [a Stalinist-influenced intellectual group]) and former members of the Irish Workers Group, a Trotskyist organisation which split up in the late sixties. Behind Saor Eire's activities is the conviction that no change can be promoted within the Republican Movement unless it is pressurised by a more militant and active *military* [emphasis in original] organisation. This approach contains a great deal of truth, for the launching of a struggle in 1956 by Saor Uladh catapulted the main body of the IRA into the Border Campaign, and forced the leadership of the IRA down off its conservative pedestal."

But, like the ERP-PRT, the Saor Eire group, "alas," was not exempt from militarist deviations.

"But Saor Eire has been caught in the same trap as the leaders of the Officials in the mid-sixties — the contradiction between political and military activity. The need for a secret military organisation has eliminated any but the most token open political work. The sum total of Saor Eire's political contribution has been one interview in 'The Red Mole,' and a short manifesto, also published in the 'Mole.' It has also meant that the group was formed on a rather vague political basis, and the pressing necessity of military action has made it even

more difficult to hammer out a coherent political position.

"The political restrictions on SE have in turn restricted its military activities, and so far it has been publicly known mainly for bank robberies. Without a stronger political content SE will not draw towards itself the kind of young revolutionaries who could make a military organisation a viable alternative to the two Republican Armies, and SE will remain a group respected for its courage and militancy but essentially marginal to the Irish struggle."

Comrade Purdie obviously recognised that there was a contradiction between the terrorist activity of Saor Eire and Marxist political work. That is, it was rather difficult to combine the two. But Comrade Purdie seemed strangely reluctant to draw the obvious conclusion from this. As a result, even his worst "hypothesis" fell far short of what ultimately happened to Saor Eire. The culmination of its activity was described in a statement by members of Saor Eire serving long prison terms in Portlaoise jail:

"We the undersigned Political Prisoners in Portlaoise Prison wish to publicly state that we have severed any connections which we have or ever had with the organisation calling itself Saor Eire. In this action we are following the lead of other genuine political elements who have resigned. Our reasons being the following: —

"(1) That Saor Eire originally was constituted to combat Imperialism in Ireland. During the last two years, owing to political weaknesses in the structure of that organisation, undesirable elements have been able to operate around its fringe and carry out actions under the name of Saor Eire which had nothing in common with the stated objectives of that organisation. As a consequence of the activities of these pseudo-political individuals, genuine revolutionaries have been in danger of being tarred with the same brush, their political integrity questioned and the possibility of their credibility with other organisations tarnished. As this element now seems to constitute the leadership of that organisation, we feel it our duty as revolutionaries to point out to the Republican Socialist Movement the degeneracy of that collection of individuals.

"(2) Furthermore these people have not alone been content to use that organisation for their own personal ends but have gone so far as to interfere with the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland by using harassment and bully-boy tactics against life long members and supporters of the Republican Movement. As has been stated in numerous press articles, a cloud of mystery still hangs over the brutal murder of a sincere and dedicated revolutionary, Peter Graham, in October 1971. Saor Eire once operated as a sincere revolutionary organisation. For us, it does no more." ("Irish Political Prisoners Quit Saor Eire," *Intercontinental Press*, June 11, 1973, p. 720.)

What was it that encouraged Comrade Purdie to make such a positive assessment of a grouping like Saor Eire, disregarding the long experience of the Marxist movement with isolated units devoted to expropriations? Was it because the situation was so grave in Ireland that desperate measures were needed to procure arms for the embattled ghetto dwellers? The Official republicans seem at one point to have believed this. Some of their men staged an airport robbery to acquire funds to buy weap-



ons. They are still in jail. Such measures do not, however, seem to have helped the Officials very much.

But Saor Eire had been engaged in expropriations for "three or four years" prior to the interview published in the *Red Mole*. That is, they started carrying out such activities at a time when there was no possibility of their being understood, much less supported, by the masses. Furthermore, despite periods of acute crisis, there has been little ongoing active mass opposition to the Dublin government, and bourgeois legality in general prevails. As far as the broad political movement and the masses are concerned there is probably less repression than, say, in France. Of course, it could be argued that big battles were on the agenda and that Leninists, as opposed to spontaneists, had to prepare militarily for this eventuality. If such was needed in Ireland, however, would it not also be correct in France, or even in England, where, as many European comrades have learned from visiting both places, the conditions of bourgeois legality do not differ greatly most of the time from those in the Twenty-Six Counties?

The question arises in view of the positions taken by the IEC Majority Tendency on "armed struggle" and the evolution of the IMG's position on Ireland, whether IMG leaders did not regard Saor Eire as an experiment in developing an "armed wing" of Irish Trotskyism that could push the revolutionary struggle forward by "injecting armed struggle." In any case, the experience of Saor Eire is highly instructive and serves as a supplementary confirmation of the correctness of the orthodox Trotskyist position on such groups.

Comrade Purdie, as I have noted, was clearly not unaware of the dilemma faced by groups like Saor Eire: "But Saor Eire has been caught in the same trap as the leaders of the Officials in the mid-sixties—the contradiction between political and military activity. The need for a secret military organization has eliminated any but the most token open political work." (*Ireland Unfree*, p. 38.)

But Comrade Purdie chose not to draw the logical conclusion from this statement. A "secret military organization" is not an obstacle to "political work" if it emerges from a mass struggle and serves as an instrument of the mass movement. In such conditions, political and military activity interlock. But it is precisely terrorist activity that is incompatible with political work, and demanding that such an organization find a way to combine political and military work is simply nonsense. It was inevitable that the isolation of this tiny commando group from the mass struggle, isolation flowing inevitably from its terrorist orientation, would lead it into deeper and deeper isolation and into more and more exclusively "armed struggle." Virtually all the members of this organization had to hide constantly from the police as a result of the bank expropriations. They could not hold jobs or risk contact with open political workers. They were forced to live on the proceeds of the expropriations, and this proved more and more costly as they were forced to depend on underworld figures for shelter and services. The expropriations had to increase to provide a steady income to maintain this kind of life, a need which in turn accelerated the process. Very large sums of money passed through the hands of this small group

that was not subjected to the discipline of a mass movement or to any effective political discipline. Undisciplined and criminal elements penetrated the organization, probably coming first from the lumpen fringe of the republican movement. Under the pressures of a perilous and irregular existence, the group degenerated. It became a deadly trap for the political elements that remained within it, and, since a group of this type can be easily used and manipulated by the police, it became a danger to the entire republican and socialist movement.

The hopes expressed by Comrade Purdie that this organization could play an important role if it developed more political activity were completely illogical. By its nature this group could not have operated in a political way. Its fate was as inevitable as anything in politics. Saor Eire, in fact, is one more object lesson that Marxism and terrorism cannot be combined. Comrade Purdie's formulas simply covered up an adaptation to terrorism, which had the same tragic results in Ireland as it has had elsewhere.

The statement of the Saor Eire prisoners strongly suggests that Comrade Peter Graham was a victim of this process. If this proves true, those who were his political teachers bear a grave responsibility, because no matter how the specific decisions were arrived at, it is absolutely clear that the political positions of the IMG favored and encouraged close relations with Saor Eire. It is also absolutely clear that these positions were sanctioned by the line of the majority at the Ninth World Congress and represent an extension of this line to Ireland.

### **The Trotskyist Martyrs; or the International 'Secret Army'**

But it is not necessary to wait for the truth about Comrade Graham's death to draw some conclusions about the way the IMG and its European cothinkers responded to this tragic incident.

"After recalling Peter Graham's life as a revolutionist, Comrade Tariq Ali issued a warning: 'At present we do not know what criminal brute shot Peter Graham to death; but we will find out; and when we do we have ways of dealing with this type of individual.

"An investigation is now in progress, but as Saor Eire declared (cf. *Rouge*, no 126), any investigation must be directed at the offices of the Special Branch (political police) in Dublin." (*Rouge*, November 6, 1971.)

Comrade Ali's solemn warning could not fail to make the headlines. This was particularly true since the Dublin papers were giving sensational coverage to the Graham killing, treating it as a mysterious gang war among the republican and far-left fringe.

Comrade Ali's threats were made even more newsworthy by an article in the independent left-liberal news weekly *This Week* by Sean Boyne.

"The Dublin Trotskyist leader Peter Graham (26) may have been murdered in the middle of a gun-running operation. Informed sources in both Dublin and London link him with a plan to smuggle guns through the 26 Counties for the IRA war against British troops in the North.

"Graham would have been in a key position for any such operation. He was the Irish representative of the Fourth International, an influential pro-IRA Trotskyist



organisation with a world-wide network of branches and previous gun-running experience. He had very close contacts with Saor Eire almost since its inception. He was reported to have had access to large sums of money and he was held in very high esteem by important members of the Provisional IRA.

"There is no evidence that the Fourth International has been involved in gun-running to Ireland. But through the organisation he would have been able to make valuable contacts abroad. The Fourth International in recent years has supplied arms for the rebellions in Cuba, Algeria and Hungary, and it has now decided on a policy of 'maximum support' for the IRA.

"But even if Graham had been running arms, and there is no conclusive proof for this, who should want to kill him? His close associates in Dublin have ruled out the possibility that he was sentenced to death as an informer by Saor Eire or any Republican organisation.

"Peter Graham was no informer and he was most security conscious," said Tariq Ali, sentiments which were echoed by all who knew the dead man. The Young Socialists have however recalled some allegations made some weeks ago by Saor Eire that 'murder squads' had been formed among right-wing gardai [police] and Special Branch men. And a London-based friend of Graham's has mentioned the possibility of a move by British Intelligence to thwart a Trotskyist intervention in the Northern Ireland situation.

"But there is also a theory that the shooting may have been ordered by some rival bank-robbing group to Saor Eire which for some reason wanted to teach the 'Trots' a lesson. It may be significant that Saor Eire men have stated in recent weeks that they were not responsible for every bank raid carried out in the 26 Counties.

"One thing is certain. Whoever was responsible for the murder is in a rather delicate position. As one London Trotskyist said ominously: 'There is an awful lot of anger about the shooting of Peter Graham.'"

Boyer's version of Comrade Ali's remark was: "We have our own ways of dealing with such people."

There is unfortunately no doubt that the IMG appreciated this kind of publicity, with all its exciting suggestions that the Fourth International was engaged in international gun-running and had its "own ways of dealing" with assassins. Comrade Ali in fact protested because *Intercontinental Press* did not reprint this flattering article in full.

In fact, one organ of a section supporting the IEC Majority Tendency seemed really to strain itself to present the situation of the Irish Trotskyists in the most heroic light:

"In difficult conditions after the cowardly assassination of Peter Graham and the mysterious death in January 1972 of Mairin Keegan, another leader of the RMG, our comrades of the Irish section are assuming an enormous task. They have to offer real support to the two branches of the republican movement (the Official and Provisional IRA), to develop Marxist analyses of the Irish question, and above all to coordinate the struggles in the North as well as the South because they alone of all the revolutionary organizations have a base both in Ulster and the Republic." (*Rouge*, June 3, 1972.)

Tragic as Comrade Keegan's death was, it was not unexplainable. She died of a long illness. She was, how-

ever, a member of Saor Eire, as a member of the RMG pointed out at a memorial meeting held for her in London.

"She was not simply an armchair Marxist, she allied theory to action. In May 1968 in Paris she took part in the struggle of the workers and students which has opened the new era of working class revolution. And in 1969, back in Ireland, as a member of the Dublin Citizens Committee and more importantly Saor Eire, she gave aid to the national revolution that has been developing in Northern Ireland. . . .

"I might conclude by wishing a long life to the FI [Fourth International] but this would be contrary to that body's aims. It wants world revolution and the world includes Ireland as soon as possible. So I prophesy a short and successful life to the FI and to Saor Eire. Let our enemies which are those of the working class beware. We are only beginning." [*The Red Mole*, January 24, 1972.]

The dangers that this kind of romantic rodomontade by the supporters of the IEC Majority Tendency represent for the entire International are only too obvious. From the standpoint of revolutionary morality, moreover, it was extremely dubious. It did not honor Graham's sacrifice but exploited it, threatening to build a farcical tissue of romantic pretensions around this death that could only discredit the Irish Trotskyists.

At the same time, this type of boastfulness and lurid imagining had a powerful momentum. For many months after the death of Comrade Graham, adventurist fantasies tended to dominate the discussions in the RMG. This was particularly noticeable in the conference of February 1972. The representative of the IMG, Comrade Lawless, to his credit, stopped this trend at one point in the discussion as it reached a dangerous point. (As for the representative of the International leadership, he was apparently not disturbed by it and in fact was anxious to reassure me when I showed signs, no doubt, of getting rather agitated.) However, it is clear from the line of *The Red Mole* and the IMG speaker at Comrade Graham's funeral that the British organization and the International leadership encouraged precisely this sort of thing. It is fortunate that Comrade Lawless decided to retreat from the logic of their adventurist line. One wonders what the IMG would have done if this kind of talk had resulted in an actual adventure and victimizations. Would they have sent a commando team to "avenge" the Irish comrades? It is much more likely that a few more martyrs would have been exploited to add to the luster of the "revolutionary pole of attraction."

### What Role for the Trotskyists in the 'Armed Vanguard'?

Once the illusions about an "armed wing" of the RMG faded, however, the question arose of how the organization could be built on the basis of the political conceptions and attitudes it derived from the IMG and via it from the IEC Majority Tendency. Could the RMG capture the leadership of one or both of the republican groups, according to the schema laid out in one of *The Red Mole's* strategy articles? If "armed struggle" was "the key," as *The Red Mole* claimed, what role did a small political nucleus have to play? Could it offer material aid or military expertise? Obviously not. Could it interest the republican organizations in its ideas? It would have a hard

time interesting the Officials in the concept that "armed struggle" was "the key," since their leadership was moving away from the old physical force theories toward a kind of orientation to the masses, that is, moving toward the more "developed socialist groups" which, according to the Saor Eire manifesto, were further from the correct approach than the old-style republicans. In fact, this guerillaist conception and the irresponsible sabre-rattling that followed Comrade Graham's death were exactly the kind of thing that would convince the Official leadership that the RMG was not to be taken seriously.

Could the RMG interest the Provisionals in their ideas, since after all this group also believed that "armed struggle" was "the key"? The Provisionals clearly had a need for political theoreticians to explain their practices and to provide some sort of consistent ideology. In particular, in dealing with radical journalists and foreign radical groups well disposed to the struggle in Ireland, left-wing spokesmen could prove very useful. Even a small left group could prove useful in carrying out pilot demonstrations and certain types of legal activity. The weakness of the Provisionals' "political wing" would make such groups all the more useful, and the absence of intellectuals in the organization has been a severe problem.

One small left group, People's Democracy, led by Michael Farrell, had some success in working with the Provisionals. However, because of its ultraleftist conceptions this group found itself simply rationalizing the adventurism and guerrillism of backward republicans. Some of their members were absorbed outright by the Provisionals, their ultraleftism fitting in quite well with the abstract moralism and "physical force" ideology of the old-style republicans. Others remained in PD but became less and less distinguishable from apolitical Provisionals.

As the Provisionals have become increasingly isolated and under fiercer and fiercer attack from the Irish and American governments, they do seem to be taking more interest in socialist and radical groups and in radical ideas. It is unlikely, however, that any small socialist nucleus can politically transform the Provisionals without combating the notion that revolutionary activity equals "physical force," or that "armed struggle" is "the key," which has prevented republicans for more than a century from seeing the necessity of developing a consistent social philosophy and political practice. That is, any group that wants to challenge the Provisionals would have to challenge their central conceptions, not rationalize them. Otherwise, these socialists, whatever Marxist veneer they succeeded in putting on their statements, would essentially be absorbed into republicanism rather than win the republicans to socialism.

How then has the training received by the RMG from the IMG equipped them to build a Trotskyist party in Ireland? The first and most obvious observation is that they could only be miseducated by the IMG's adaptationism. You cannot win people to your ideas by adapting to theirs. It is important in particular for a small group that has not yet proved itself in action to strive to understand the attitudes and conceptions of the larger forces that are actually in the leadership of important struggles and to seek points of convergence that can serve to initiate a dialogue. But, at the same time, it is equally important for such a small group not to fuzz over political differences or confine itself to "critical" praise. It

must make clear what it has to offer, centering its limited resources on highlighting its specific political message. It is clear, moreover, that although it has been seriously hampered in its work by the miseducation it has received from the IMG, the RMG does have vital contributions to make to the Irish revolution. In the first place, the arsenal of Trotskyism is available to it.

### **The Theoretical Gains of the Irish Trotskyists**

Furthermore, despite its handicaps, the RMG already has a number of basic achievements to its credit. It is the only group in Ireland that has been able to apply the theory of the permanent revolution to Irish conditions. It is the only group on the scene that has been able to advance in theoretical understanding of the socialist dynamic of the national struggle in Ireland. Consistent with this, it is the only group that has been able to understand the revolutionary dynamic of the feminist movement in Irish conditions in particular. It is the only group that has shown a potential to offer a perspective to the very young generation of Irish revolutionists in the secondary schools, the youth who have formed the backbone of the struggle in the North in particular and whose aspirations have been most brutally thwarted by the failure of the national revolution in Ireland. These youth especially have been badly let down by the big militant nationalist organizations. The Officials, on the one hand, have tried to subject them to paternalistic tutelage. The Provisionals, on the other, have used them as cannon fodder in their adventurist policies without offering them the opportunity for political development or for participating in a democratic decision-making process.

The fact that the RMG has achieved as much as it has is, in view of the difficult circumstances in which the Irish Trotskyists have found themselves, an extremely hopeful sign. In the first place, the reputation of Trotskyism among the vanguard in Ireland is a bad one. It is associated with irresponsible adventurism and abstract dogmatism, with the most vulgar forms of left opportunism, unprincipled intrigue, and sectarian cliquism. In particular, groups claiming to be Trotskyist are widely regarded as artificial extensions of English sects. Unfortunately, the history of the various groups that have claimed to be Trotskyist offers an empirical basis for such feelings. The leadership of the RMG had to begin their political lives with a bitter fight against a hardened sectarian clique that denied the revolutionary dynamic of the national struggle. They had to struggle against older and talented leaders who miseducated and failed them. They have had to build their organization in an atmosphere poisoned by the fantastic and ridiculous pretensions of a variety of "Trotskyist" sects that offer a dismal contrast to the hard struggle and sacrifices of the militant nationalist fighters in the North. Nevertheless, the RMG leaders have shown a stubborn faith in Trotskyism and have continued their activity in difficult conditions and over a long period of little gains.

But the greatest difficulty that the RMG has had to face since its inception and which it has not yet overcome has been the miseducation it received from the IMG and the IEC Majority Tendency. After their experience with the sterility of Healyite sectarianism, it was natural for the Irish Trotskyists to look with hope to the nearest sections of the Fourth International and to the prestigious

theoreticians of Western Europe. In particular, the IMG seemed capable of offering effective theoretical aid because it alone of all the British groups claiming to be Trotskyist showed an ability to understand the dynamic of the national struggle.

However, at the same time as they learned some vitally important lessons from the IMG, the RMG absorbed the politics of adaptation represented by the Ninth World Congress turn. In the period leading up to the assassination of Comrade Graham and for several months thereafter adaptation to adventurism jeopardized not only the political program of the organization but the physical survival of the young and inexperienced cadres that made it up. Nor were the Irish comrades greatly helped by the International leadership bringing in a special advisor to give a first-hand account of how to apply the Ninth World Congress resolution on Latin America. Because of the strength of the terrorist tradition in Ireland, the Irish Trotskyists needed political help from the International in developing an effective Marxist critique of such methods. Instead they got encouragement to adapt to them, to rationalize them, to become the most sophisticated defenders of terrorism.

### Irish Trotskyists Without a Political Compass

Because they were actually in the Irish situation, however, the RMG could not simply applaud the "dazzling coups" of the guerrillas. They were affected directly by the political results of terrorist errors. They experienced the political weaknesses of the "physical force" current immediately in their work. They also had to take the blame for the failure of the IMG to build an effective solidarity movement. All these things had an evident effect. Furthermore, the RMG has not yet been imbued with the dead-end factionalism that has afflicted the IMG and has shown an ability to learn from its errors. Unfortunately, however, it has not broken with the adaptationist method it learned from the IMG, and as a result its attempts to correct its course seem to have led so far deeper into political confusion rather than toward clarification. Many examples could be given of this. It is sufficient to cite the article "The Actuality of Terrorism" by Eanna O'Caithirneach [I assume that this is a masculine name, although Gaelic grammar was apparently ignored in its composition] in a recent issue of *Marxist Review*, the theoretical journal of the Irish comrades.

In the first part, Comrade O'Caithirneach says:

"In fact it is easy enough to point out that *terrorism of the oppressed* is a concrete reply to the terror, violence institutionalized by the ruling classes, without which they could not stay in power. But it is useless to preach in the desert, we do not expect those who use or profit from this violence to denounce it.

"Moreover a debate of this importance must be taken up by those who claim to be on the same side of the barricade; those who fight precisely for the abolition of *class violence*, the source of all violence, and who know that bourgeois violence can only be abolished by revolutionary violence, ultimately by the overthrow of one class by another. The ambiguity of what terrorism really means is a fundamental problem for the clarification of such a debate. So we see the American Marxist philosopher George Novack writing:

"Terrorism is a product of subjectivism and impatience,

of frustration and desperation. Despite the loud noises made by its intermittent chemical warfare, it is an expression of political and social defeatism arising from a fundamental lack of confidence in the potential of the working people to recognize the need to get rid of the capitalist regime, engage it in struggle, and overcome it."

"The basic error of such a statement lies in the fact that it tries to define a concept in the abstract rather than as a *method of struggle* related to the historical phases of development of class struggle. Instead of clarifying the matter, such a generalization prevents us from analyzing concrete situations and taking a position in relation to the given moments of mass struggle.

"In fact the above quotation plays on an ambiguity which feeds moralistic positions common to the bourgeoisie and to reformism. It betrays a failure to understand that two different problems must be distinguished and analyzed from a Marxist standpoint: firstly, terrorism as a *political orientation*, and then terrorism as a *social phenomenon*."

Comrade O'Caithirneach went on to say:

"Indeed the history of the international working-class movement is paved with examples of groups of intellectuals or the like at the *periphery* of the mass struggle looking for *shortcuts* to the destruction of the ruling class. Suffice it to say that the ruling class can replace its leaders, of uneven value, as long as it owns the means of production; it is because there lies its strength that only a mass movement expropriating the bourgeoisie, can smashing its state, put an end to its domination."

### Unresolved Contradictions

Comrade O'Caithirneach gives this contemporary example of the sort of terrorism that Marxists should oppose:

"The 'underestimation of the revolutionary activity of the masses' is exactly the type of mistakes that today 'urban guerrilla groupings', such as the Baader-Meinhof group (RAF) in Germany, the Red Army in Japan, the 'Weathermen' in the States, the 'Angry Brigade' in Britain, have elevated to a virtue." In a footnote this point is qualified. "There is a qualitative difference in our mind between such guerrilla ultra-left organizations (coming from Maoist or Libertarian currents) in the heart of imperialist citadels and organizations *formally* of the same type—such as the Free Welsh Army, the FLB (Liberation Front of Brittany), Saor Eire, the FLQ (Liberation Front of Quebec) which in *content* aimed at expressing by armed minority actions the revolt of oppressed nations or nationalities. Although in some cases (Brittany, Wales) such organizations won sympathy of one part of the population, they had in common with the other groupings mentioned their ultimate isolation and fate."

Clearly Comrade O'Caithirneach has received a mis-education in the use of Marxist categories. In the first place, he shows a dismaying reluctance, strikingly reminiscent of Comrade Purdie, to draw Marxist conclusions from the statement of Marxist principles. If they shared the political and physical fate of terrorist organizations in the capitalist centers, if their actions have had the same consequences, how can it be said that organizations like the FLB are "qualitatively" different from the Angry Brigade? They do not simply formally resemble terrorist groups in capitalist centers; they have shared the fate of the latter groups *in reality*. "Formal" thus does not seem to have the same meaning for Comrade O'Caithir-

neach that it does in the Marxist vocabulary; it seems to be some kind of magic word that can be used to charm away a real problem. If Comrade O'Caithirneach's statement is not to be interpreted as pure idealism, he would have to explain what chance factors account for these "qualitatively different" groups sharing essentially the same fate. Might Saor Eire have succeeded for example if it had been more fortunate in this or that respect? Should this experiment be repeated?

It is true, of course, that in oppressed nations any blow against the oppressor tends to win very broad immediate sympathy, whereas it is much more difficult to make an impact on the masses in the imperialist centers where the forms of control are more subtle and opaque. But even in the imperialist centers adventurism does not always fail, at least not right away, to produce some positive results. Thus, obviously the chances of success are all the greater in oppressed nations. But the very fact that the contradictions are more explosive in such cases makes adventurist errors all the more serious. They tend to result not just in the victimization of a few idealistic and self-sacrificing revolutionists or a temporary witch-hunt but in beheading mass movements that could strike telling blows against the world capitalist system and in the destruction of the small number of politically trained cadres that can be produced under conditions of repression and cultural deprivation. At best, a guerrillaist orientation in such countries makes liberation struggles unnecessarily costly and exhausting and thus robs these struggles of much of their revolutionary dynamism and political power.

### Rationalizing Subjectivism

From the subjective point of view, there is of course a difference between the sort of terrorist groups that have arisen in the capitalist centers and those arising in the colonial countries and oppressed nations. The desperate actions of militants in oppressed and brutally exploited nations commands a special sympathy. Here Comrade O'Caithirneach is right to say that the "qualitative difference" he is talking about exists "in the minds" of himself and his cothinkers. That is precisely where it exists; not in reality. They have allowed themselves to become subjective. This is natural on the part of young revolutionists, especially those in oppressed countries who feel a strong empathy with others of their generation who are striking heroic blows against the imperialist oppressor. But a revolutionary party and a revolutionary strategy cannot be built on such subjective feelings. Marxists are not simply the fiercest militants but those who are conscious of a higher duty to the oppressed people and who have an intellectual and organizational discipline, a relentless logic and understanding of long-term processes, that enables them to lead revolutionary struggles to the final victory. The Russian Marxists, for example, had to take an extremely critical position toward a whole generation of heroic youth who eventually won mass sympathy. The party of the Narodniks, after all, was a mass party in 1917, far larger than the Bolsheviks.

The example of the Bolsheviks and their teachers is quite well known and its validity is accepted by most revolutionary groups. Comrade Caithirneach, on his own, might have been able to learn from it, especially in the light of the hard experience of the Irish fighters, as other

generations of young revolutionists have. But he was apparently encouraged to "interpret" the Bolsheviks' position in a way that fundamentally justified his subjective sympathy with the adventurists in Ireland. With this political and theoretical assistance, he discovered a previously rather neglected part of the revolutionary Marxist heritage.

"After 1905, Lenin distinguished acts of terrorism, the number of which was increasing without respite, from the *terrorist orientation* of the anarchists and revolutionary Socialists before 1905.

"In the first case, disarray and impatience led romantic intellectuals to transform their frustrations of being absent from the class struggle, into a strategy. After the revolution of 1905, they were faced with a *deeper social movement* which prolonged the revolutionary crisis; terrorism then was characterized by resistance demonstrations, acts of sabotage, expropriations, boldness of workers and peasants. This increased the revolutionary consciousness of the masses who drew the lessons from 1905. At this point it was necessary for the Social Democratic Party to enrich its political experience with these new methods of struggle."

A quotation follows from Lenin's 1906 article on guerrilla warfare that has been widely cited by the IEC Majority Tendency in defense of its orientation. Comrade O'Caithirneach, then, goes on to say:

"Consequently, the Bolshevik party used guerrilla actions, relating it to the question of *workers' self-defence* against reaction (Black Hundred pogroms, etc.), and the crucial problem of preparation for armed insurrection, therefore having an educative role for the masses. Those who argue today that Lenin opposed the concept of the *dialectical link between minority violence and mass struggle*, should remember his articles on the subject in 1905, 1906, and 1907, and for instance his preparatory notes to the Stockholm Congress in 1906:

"'1) The armed actions of the combat groups belonging to the Party and fighting on their own are acceptable on the grounds of principle and opportunities in the actual period.

"'2) The character of the armed actions must be adapted to the task of forming leaders of the working masses in the period of insurrection and acquire the experience of offensive actions.

"'3) The immediate and most urgent objective of these actions must be the destruction of the apparatus of government, politically and militarily, and the actions must be particularly directed against active organizations like the 'Black Hundred' which use violence and terror against the population.

"'4) Must be considered as well, armed actions directed towards obtaining financial resources from the enemy, that is to say, from the autocratic regime, in order to use those means to the benefit of the insurrection; one must remember that the interests of the masses must be affected to the least possible extent'."

Comrade O'Caithirneach concludes: "This shows precisely what differentiates our comrades of the PRT/ERP in Argentina of the ETA (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna—Liberation movement of the Basque country) in Spain, and the Volunteers of the IRA who carry out armed actions in the context of mass struggle, from the experience of the Baader-Meinhof or the Angry Brigade."



Unfortunately, Comrade O'Caithirneach makes the same error here that he charges against Comrade Novack; he makes an abstract generalization, failing to take proper account of the concrete circumstances. Among other things, this indicates that he uses "abstraction" like "formal" not as a Marxist description but as a magic word to conjure away difficulties.

Lenin regarded the skirmishing that followed the defeat of the 1905 revolution as representing a form of struggle appropriate to a lull in the civil war preceding a new upsurge of the revolutionary struggle that was unleashed by a general strike leading to a mass insurrection, a mass insurrection that was prepared by patient Marxist propaganda and intervention in the mass movement—not by "new methods" or "exemplary actions" or "minority violence." The next installment of the revolution, moreover, was prepared in the same way, and acts of "minority violence" were opposed by the Bolshevik leadership in the period leading up to the general insurrection. No "new methods" of guerrilla warfare were employed.

Despite this, Comrade O'Caithirneach seems to regard these as relevant for a whole historical epoch and in a wide range of countries. These methods are supposed to be valid for Spain under Franco, for Ireland, and for Argentina (the article was apparently written before Comrade O'Caithirneach learned that the PRT/ERP had broken with the Fourth International). No mass insurrection has taken place in these countries, either on a national scale or in the key centers. The decisive masses have not risen up against the system. In the case of Ireland in particular it is quite clear now that the use of these "new methods" has narrowed the struggle and isolated the most advanced sections of the population; that is, it has had the classical result of terrorism and adventurism.

But Comrade O'Caithirneach argues:

"There what Lenin condemns is a violence which is not *subordinated* to strategic objectives, which does not fit in an overall project of seizure of power—violence which is not understood and supported by the masses, because as Georg Lukacs pointed out:

"These isolated battles which never bring final victory even when they are successful can only become truly revolutionary when the proletariat becomes conscious of what connects these battles to each other and to the process that leads ineluctably to the demise of capitalism."

Obviously one thing that all three situations—Ireland, Spain, and Argentina—have in common is that significant sections of the population support the actions of terrorist groups. Moreover, they "understand" them in the sense of knowing what motivates them and against whom they are aimed. That is, the argument goes, actions which are popular among a section of the people cannot be terrorist.

There is no doubt that at least in Ireland such actions are in a sense "linked" to the mass struggle. Although the Provisional campaign has had the effect of crippling the mass movement, its extent and relative popularity are clearly the result of a mass upsurge. Moreover, the Provisionals' terrorist strikes take place within the context of mass resistance to the British occupation and the Orange caste system. But at the same time instead of being "linked" to the mass struggle (any more than the Argentine guerrilla actions were "linked" to the struggle

against the dictatorship), the Provisional campaign was in irreconcilable contradiction to it; it did not extend the mass struggle and carry it forward to a revolutionary mass mobilization on a scale that could lay the basis for an effective war against the imperialists and their supporters; but set back and weakened the mass movement.

According to *The Red Mole*, the Provisional bombing campaign was designed to impose unbearable costs on the British government and draw troops away from the Catholic ghettos. Moreover, it supposedly had the effect of preventing the British from "stabilizing" the situation. That is, it can be claimed that this campaign was "*subordinated*" to strategic objectives. But these generalizations were used to cover up the reality—an uncontrolled and uncontrollable campaign of random bombing that confused the political issues, demoralized and alienated the broad masses, especially in the south, and was easily manipulated by the British authorities, making repression easier instead of more difficult. But still this campaign was undoubtedly popular among a fairly broad vanguard. It was "linked" to the struggle of the masses, so it couldn't be terrorist, could it?

### Trotsky on 'Mass' Terrorism

But according to Trotsky's explanation in his 1911 article on terrorism (see "The Marxist Position on Individual Terrorism," in *Intercontinental Press*, August 6, 1973, p. 955), the terrorists are precisely most dangerous when they have the sympathy of the masses:

"In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it *belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness*, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes toward a greater avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission.

"The anarchist prophets of 'the propaganda of the deed' can argue all they want about the elevating and stimulating influence of terrorist acts on the masses. Theoretical considerations and political experience prove otherwise. The more 'effective' the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more the attention of the masses is focused on them—the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organization and self-education.

"But the smoke from the explosion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement come disillusion and apathy.

"The efforts of reaction to put an end to strikes and to the mass workers movement in general have always, everywhere, ended in failure. Capitalist society needs an active, mobile, and intelligent proletariat; it cannot, therefore, bind the proletariat hand and foot for very long. On the other hand the anarchist 'propaganda of the deed' has shown every time that the state is much richer in the means of physical destruction and mechanical repression than are the terrorist groups.

"If that is so, where does it leave the revolution? Is it negated or rendered impossible by this state of affairs? Not at all. For the revolution is not a simple aggregate of mechanical means. The revolution can arise only out



of the sharpening of the class struggle, and it can find a guarantee of victory only in the social functions of the proletariat. The mass political strike, the armed insurrection, the conquest of state power—all this is determined by the degree to which production has been developed, the alignment of class forces, the proletariat's social weight, and finally, by the social composition of the army, since the armed forces are the factor that in time of revolution determines the fate of state power."

Hasn't the Northern minority been encouraged by the guerrilla actions of the Provisionals to look to the "secret army" of the republic for their salvation? Haven't the masses become continually more passive as the Provisional campaign has developed? Hasn't the number of people actively supporting the struggle consistently declined? That all these questions must be answered in the affirmative cannot be denied by any objective person, especially not by a Marxist, who must look at the situation as a whole and not be dazzled by the partial successes of those elements that strike the most spectacular blows against the repressive forces. The proof of this lies in the effectiveness of the repressive apparatuses North and South, in particular in the attitude of the Southern state that has gone further in collaborating with the British government and in suppressing the republican organizations than it has dared to go since the start of the present struggle.

In fact, the relative successes of the Provisionals, in the context of a steady decline of the struggle in the North and an increasing isolation of the oppressed Catholic communities, is a clear refutation of the IEC Majority Tendency's vanguardist orientation. The popularity of the Provisionals with the most militant elements has increased precisely as the real power of the struggle has waned. Inevitably this will catch up with the Provisional organization itself, unless it changes its line or other factors intervene, but throughout this process the following of the Provisionals has increased by leaps and bounds.

Furthermore, Comrade O'Caithirneach not only took Lenin's 1905 article out of its historical context but apparently did not consider the balance sheet that the Russian revolutionary Marxists made later of the experience with guerrilla warfare in these years. Of course, he could not have learned this from the IEC Majority Tendency's writings. But in his book on Stalin, Trotsky discussed the "mass" terrorism of 1906-1909 in some detail, and offered more than one lesson that could prove useful in Ireland:

"It was not, of course, a matter of abstract morality. All classes and parties approached the problem of assassination not from the point of view of the Biblical commandment but from the vantage point of the historical interests represented. When the Pope and his cardinals blessed the arms of Franco none of the conservative statesmen suggested that they be imprisoned for inciting murders. Official moralists come out against violence when the violence in question is revolutionary. On the contrary, whoever really fights against class oppression, must perforce acknowledge revolution. Whoever acknowledges revolution, acknowledges civil war. Finally, 'guerrilla warfare is an inescapable form of struggle . . . when ever more or less extensive intervals occur between major engagements in a civil war.' [Lenin.] From the point of view of the general principles of the class struggle,

all of that was quite irrefutable. Disagreements came with the evaluation of concrete historical circumstances. When two major battles of the civil war are separated from each other by two or three months, that interval will inevitably be filled in with guerrilla blows against the enemy. But when the 'intermission' is stretched out over years, guerrilla war ceases to be a preparation for a new battle and becomes instead a convulsion after defeat. It is of course, not easy to determine the moment of the break.

"Questions of Boycottism and of guerrilla activities were closely interrelated. It is permissible to boycott representative assemblies only in the event that the mass movement is sufficiently strong either to overthrow them or to ignore them. But when the masses are in retreat, the tactic of the boycott loses its revolutionary meaning. Lenin understood that and explained it better than others. As early as 1905 he repudiated the boycott of the Duma. After the coup of June third, 1907, he led a resolute fight against the Boycottists precisely because the high-tide had been succeeded by the ebb-tide. It was self-evident that guerrilla activities had become sheer anarchism when it was necessary to utilize even the arena of Tsarist 'parliamentarism' in order to prepare the ground for the mobilization of the masses. [Trotsky notes elsewhere that the actual scope of the guerrilla war reached its peak in 1907, that is, after Lenin rejected boycottism and by extension the use of the "new methods" mentioned in the 1906 article. Lenin obviously did not base his judgment on the "military" success of the "armed struggle."—G.F.] At the crest of the civil war guerrilla activities augmented and stimulated the mass movement; in the period of reaction they attempted to replace it, but, as a matter of fact, merely embarrassed the Party and speeded its disintegration. Olminsky, one of the more noticeable of Lenin's companions-in-arms, shed critical light on that period from the perspective of Soviet times. 'Not a few of the fine youth,' he wrote, 'perished on the gibbet; others degenerated; still others were disappointed in the revolution. At the same time people at large began to confound revolutionists with ordinary bandits. Later, when the revival of the revolutionary labor movement began, that revival was slowest in those cities where 'exes' [expropriations—G.F.] had been most numerous.' [Stalin, pp. 98-99.]

In the case of the 1906-09 guerrilla warfare, also, the popularity of terrorism increased as the fundamental movement that gave it its mass character declined:

"On the whole, the three-year period from 1905 through 1907 is particularly notable for both terrorist acts and strikes. But what stands out is the divergence between their statistical records: while the number of strikers fell off rapidly from year to year, the number of terrorist acts mounted with equal rapidity. Clearly, individual terrorism increased as the mass movement declined. Yet terrorism could not grow stronger indefinitely. The impetus unleashed by the revolution was bound to spend itself in terrorism as it had spent itself in other spheres. Indeed, while there were 1,231 assassinations in 1907, they dropped to 400 in 1908 and to about a hundred in 1909. The growing percentage of the merely wounded indicated, moreover, that now the shooting was being done by untrained amateurs, mostly by callow young-

sters." (Page 96.)

Furthermore, Trotsky clearly did not draw the conclusion that the devotees of "armed struggle" were the purest revolutionary current:

"In the Caucasus, with its romantic traditions of highway robbery and gory feuds still very much alive, guerrilla warfare found any number of fearless practitioners. More than a thousand terrorist acts of all kinds were perpetrated in Transcaucasia alone during 1905-1907, the years of the First Revolution. Fighting detachments found also a great spread of activity in the Urals, under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, and in Poland under the banner of the P.P.S. (Polish Socialist Party). On the second of August, 1906, scores of policemen and soldiers were assassinated on the streets of Warsaw and other Polish cities. According to the explanation of the leaders, the purpose of the attacks was 'to bolster the revolutionary mood of the proletariat.' The leader of these leaders was Joseph Pilsudski, the future 'liberator' of Poland, and its oppressor." (Page 96.)

Among other things, reading Trotsky on Stalin would have forewarned the Irish comrades about the prospects for Saor Eire:

"A typical picture of how even the most disciplined detachments degenerated is given in his memoirs by the already-cited Samoilov, a former Duma deputy of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk textile workers. The detachment, acting originally 'under the directives of the Party Center,' began to 'misbehave' during the second half of 1906. When it offered the Party only a part of the money it had stolen at a factory (having killed the cashier during the act), the Party Committee refused it flatly and reprimanded the fighters. But it was already too late; they were disintegrating rapidly and soon descended to 'bandit attacks of the most ordinary criminal type.' Always having large sums of money, the fighters began to preoccupy themselves with carousing, in the course of which they often fell into the hands of the police. Thus, little by little, the entire fighting detachment came to an ignominious end. 'We must, however, admit,' writes Samoilov, 'that in its ranks were not a few . . . genuinely devoted comrades who were loyal to the cause of the revolution and some with hearts as pure as crystal . . .'" (Page 97.)

The Irish comrades have not been taught to recognize a decline in the mass struggle and draw the necessary conclusions from it. For them, guerrilla warfare seems to always move forward. After all, doesn't it represent the "revolutionary phase" of the struggle, according to the IEC Majority Tendency? As a result of this training, they called for a boycott of the Northern elections in May and June, 1973, on the grounds, among other things, that the struggle had gone beyond parliamentarism. The Irish comrades thought the thing to do was to call for reviving the forms of dual power that existed at the height of the popular upsurge. But they failed (1) to recognize that the mass movement was in a steep decline and (2) to recognize that the embryonic dual power that existed was the result of the mass civil-rights movement and could not be revived without a revival first of the broad movement that engendered it. That is, under the influence of the miseducation they received from the IMG and the IEC Majority Tendency, they made the fundamental error of

mistaking the hind part of a revolution for the fore part. Thus, they were left unarmed for grappling with the realities of the situation and assuming their real tasks.

## The Example of Algeria

There was something obviously very wrong, fundamentally wrong, with the method these young comrades used. It lay in the subjectivism so evident in Eanna O'Caithirneach's approach to the question of terrorism. If so many people were doing it, there had to be something to it. Moral solidarity with the heroic young terrorists became subtly transmuted into political endorsement, tail-ending, of their actions in the way that became so typical of *The Red Mole's* Irish articles. In the process Marxist categories were turned into empty generalities to rationalize impressionist judgments. At first this process led simply to a political default, a refusal to face the realities squarely and draw the necessary conclusions. But over time, it was inevitable that this kind of fuzzy thinking would lead to total confusion. And such confusion, unfortunately, is the distinguishing feature of Comrade O'Caithirneach's article.

After quoting Lenin to try to demonstrate the value of the "new methods" of guerrilla warfare and then arguing that terrorism is not terrorism when it is supported by large layers of the population, Comrade O'Caithirneach goes on to explain that there really is a terrorist problem in the new mass vanguard.

"As we pointed out above, terrorism for the past years has taken on a world dimension. It is essential to understand that such a phenomenon is objectively a product of the crisis of capitalism itself.

"After the late 60s, a new revolutionary vanguard has emerged in the context of this crisis of capitalism but also of the crisis of traditional workers' parties, particularly in rupture with Stalinism. But this revolutionary vanguard has not necessarily emerged organized in a strong credible revolutionary pole. As a matter of fact, the crux of the problem lies in the inadequacy between the maturation of the objective revolutionary situation and the weaknesses of the organized revolutionary vanguard. This gap leaves young generations of revolutionary militants oscillating between revolutionary exhalation and desperate revolt."

Isn't this exactly the kind of mood Comrade Novack was describing in the passage that Comrade O'Caithirneach found so "abstract," "moralistic," and so dangerously open to "reformist" interpretation? Why is he unable to draw the obvious conclusion?

Two examples of this problem are given by Comrade O'Caithirneach—the Palestinian resistance, which receives short shrift, except for the DFFLP; and the Provisional bombing campaign, which is viewed much more sympathetically. The bombing campaign may have had its weaknesses but after all "the split of the Orange monolith was consummated through this campaign. Unlike the 'Black September' action which solidified the Zionist front, the Provisional Campaign blew up the Orange front; this campaign in spite of technical mistakes, of political weaknesses, was successful only because it was linked intimately with mass resistance struggle."

Anyway, it was the only game in town: "Eventually it is theoretically correct to say that if a Revolutionary Socialist Party had led the armed struggle in Ireland,

the liberation war would have reached a higher level; likewise it is correct to say and to propagandize for the transformation of the Army of the People (IRA) into the People's Army [This formulation is puzzling. In view of the IMG's dalliance with the Dáil Uladh conception, the question arises whether Comrade O'Caithirneach thinks that a revolutionary armed force can be created from above first and given popular content afterward. — G. F.], through the organization of People's militias, Vigilantes Units and the like, elected and armed by the population for the protection of the ghettos.

"But the point is, that Socialists have got to take sides, whether or not such situation exists. To condemn or refuse to support the IRA at this stage by arguing 'that it would be better if such a situation existed' does not in actual terms provide help in the process of political maturation of this organization; moreover it condemns those who issue such statements to sheer political isolation from the class or the national struggle; likewise it prevents them to influence politically their course.

"This has been clearly demonstrated during the Algerian war of liberation when the Fourth International refused either to tail-end reformists or to sacrifice content for the form when denouncing the M.N.A. which sounded more Marxists [sic] to many and ended by pledging its support to Charles de Gaulle in 1958. Instead it supported the FLN (National Liberation Front) coupling technical help (e.g. the publication of their paper 'El Mujahid') with political support. This laid the basis for a political radicalization, which one will easily appreciate when studying the evolution of the FLN from the 1954 bombings to the establishment of 'Workers' and Peasants' Control' in 1963 under the leadership of Ben Bella and his comrades."

Apparently Comrade O'Caithirneach has based a whole strategy for orienting toward guerrilla movements on a one-sided version of the Algerian experience. Is he aware that in Algeria itself, after years of activity, the Trotskyist movement made no lasting impact whatsoever either in terms of cadres or political influence? While it is possible for socialist intellectuals to gain considerable personal influence in broad national liberation groups by becoming technical experts of various kinds, it is not possible to educate a cadre without firmly putting forward clear Marxist principles. No one except dead-end sectarians of the SLL variety would say that revolutionists should condemn or denounce terrorists or guerrilla fighters. But Marxists cannot point the way forward without keeping their principles clear.

The guerrillas will learn by their own experience, the results of political errors, and, if they have the capacity for political development, look for the answers where they are to be found, not from their "friends" who employed their superior political education to rationalize their errors. The whole development in the Latin-American left since 1969 shows this lesson clearly. At the very time the majority of the young revolutionists were abandoning the guerrilla orientation, under the blows of reality, the followers of the Ninth World Congress Majority became its most insistent supporters. Not only did they fail to influence the broader Guevarist currents but they lost the bulk of their forces to alien ideas (this was the fate, for instance of the "comrades of the PRT/ERP"). Unfortunately, in spite of these experiences (does he know of

them? has he discussed them? what are his opinions of the losses the Trotskyist movement suffered in Latin America?), Comrade O'Caithirneach seems to have elevated adaptationism into a strategy for a whole period, and on the basis of an idealized version of the Algerian experience! He could have learned this only from the IEC Majority Tendency.

## What Road Forward?

This adaptationism ultimately makes the article almost incomprehensible. It is impossible to draw any clear political line from it. After all this "understanding" and "solidarity," the concluding appeal to young revolutionists, tempted by the seemingly more direct road of terrorism to "seek another road," loses all force and coherence. He writes:

"As we noted earlier in this expose, it is vital to understand that new generations of revolutionaries can be misled in the deadlock of terrorist actions which they consider revolutionary in essence.

"The reformists siding with the bourgeoisie condemn them. The duty of revolutionary Marxists is to face frankly the situation, remembering what Trotsky said of Herschel Grynszpan, this young Jewish terrorist who killed a member of the Nazi embassy in Paris in 1938:

"'People come cheap who are only capable of fulminating against injustice and bestiality. But those who, like Grynszpan, are able to act as well as conceive, sacrificing their own lives if need be, are the precious leaven of mankind.

"'In the moral sense, although not for his mode of action, Grynszpan may serve as an example for every young revolutionist. Our moral solidarity with Grynszpan gives us an added right to say to all the other would-be Grynszpans, to all those capable of self-sacrifice in the struggle against despotism and bestiality: SEEK ANOTHER ROAD!

"'Not the lone avenger can free the oppressed but only a great revolutionary movement of the masses which will leave no remnant of the entire structure of class exploitation, national oppression and racial persecution.'"

What is Comrade O'Caithirneach's conclusion from this passage? He either cannot understand or cannot accept (which is more likely) Trotsky's clear call to fighters like Grynszpan to abandon terrorism and take the road of Marxism. Instead he draws a peculiarly centrist conclusion that suggests a sort of convergence between terrorism and the Marxist movement, a "fusion" perhaps of Marxism and republicanism. Comrade O'Caithirneach writes:

"The lesson is simple: the commitment and energy of such militants must be used to the best of their capability; the task of a revolutionary organization is to provide this 'road' linking their struggle with the masses of workers in motion. In this sense, even minority violence can be used as tactical means in the over-all strategy for the conquest of power by the masses.

"Under these conditions it will be possible to use fully the experience of groups of militants who fight to a certain extent in the dark, but unsparingly.

"To win these militants over to the proletarian revolution is vital, for in every generation there are few mili-

tants of this calibre; but in order to win them over, one must understand their struggle."

What road, then, is Comrade O'Caithirneach recommending? The road of Marxism—of educating, organizing, and mobilizing the masses? Then, why all the justification of terrorism? On the other hand, he obviously does think that there is something wrong with terrorism. But what it is precisely is hard to say. If the Provisionals' brand of terrorism is more closely tied to the mass struggle than other varieties, how have they achieved this? What is the secret of their success? What political lessons can the Palestinian resistance learn from them? Obviously, none. The difference between the terrorism of the Palestinians and the Provisionals is not the result of any strategy or political conceptions but of conditions that neither movement produced or had any control over. The Orange monolith was split by the rise of the civil-rights movement; it was deepened by the mass resistance of the Catholic people. The terrorist actions of the Provisionals could not break the morale of the Loyalists or the hold of Orangeism over them. Why does Comrade O'Caithirneach think that Protestants can be expected to react differently to isolated acts of terrorism in Protestant neighborhoods than Israeli Jews to the actions of Black September? Have his advisors really answered that question?

In all, the educational and scientific value of this attempt to demonstrate a contrast between the actions of the Palestinians (except DPFLP) and that of the Provisionals is zero. Comrade O'Caithirneach calls on the heroic youth of Ireland, in the words of the founder of the Red Army, to 'seek another road' but without pointing to any definite road at all. If he had only begun his quote a few lines above, or continued it a few lines further, the road would have been clear. In the preceding sentence, Trotsky says:

"The Stalinists shriek in the ears of the police that Grynspan attended 'meetings of Trotskyites.' That, unfortunately, is not true. For had he walked into the milieu of the Fourth International he would have discovered a different and more effective outlet for his revolutionary energy." The article ends: "The unprecedented crimes of fascism create a yearning for vengeance wholly justifiable. But so monstrous is the scope of their crimes, that this yearning cannot be satisfied by the assassination of isolated fascist bureaucrats. For that it is necessary to set in motion millions, tens and hundreds of millions of the oppressed throughout the whole world and lead them in the assault upon the strongholds of the old society. Only the overthrow of all forms of slavery, only the complete destruction of fascism, only the people sitting in merciless judgment over the contemporary bandits and gangsters can provide real satisfaction to the indignation of the people. This is precisely the task that the Fourth International has set itself. It will cleanse the labor movement of the plague of Stalinism. It will rally in its ranks the heroic generation of the youth. It will cut a path to a worthier and more humane future." ("For Grynspan: Against the Fascist Pogrom Gangs and Stalinist Scoundrels," *Intercontinental Press*, October 16, 1972, pp. 1126-27.)

Trotsky was clearly not talking about artificially "link-

ing" the struggle of terrorists to the masses but about "another road" entirely, the road of the Transitional Program for organizing mass insurrection.

"Only armed workers' detachments who feel the support of tens of millions of toilers behind them can successfully prevail against the fascist bands." Obviously such numbers could not be achieved in Ireland, but a far broader movement than either or both of the IRAs is necessary to successfully confront imperialism and the Orange bands. Trotsky also said: "It is necessary to advance the slogan of a *workers' militia* . . ." He does not say that "obviously it would be better" if there were a workers militia but in the meantime the choice is do you or do you not support the terrorist groups that exist. Comrade O'Caithirneach's counterposition of support or non-support is nothing but a false dilemma. It goes without saying that every revolutionist supports the IRA against imperialism and the Orange and capitulationist bourgeoisies. As such, for Marxists, this statement is as elementary and meaningless as an aphorism from Mao's Little Red Book. That is about how much the method of "elliptical and synthetic phrases" illustrated by the Ninth World Congress Resolution on Latin America is worth. This soporific truism has been used to charm away the real political problem—what program must be raised. Just because we support the IRA against imperialism we do not stop putting forward our program. To do that would mean definitively abandoning the political leadership of the struggle to non-Marxist forces, tail-ending a non-Marxist program. There is no future for a Trotskyist group that does this (at least not as a Trotskyist group).

### The Need for Leninist Clarity

What have been the practical effects of the method illustrated by Comrade O'Caithirneach's article? While it is not possible, of course, to get a complete picture from relatively short visits, some very disturbing symptoms can be noticed very quickly. The first is the ease with which this very young, inexperienced, and highly vulnerable group was led into the wildest adventurist delusions in the period around Comrade Graham's death by the guerrillaist orientation of the IEC Majority Tendency. The second is its consistent misjudgment of the situation in the North and the state of the mass movement, as shown in the document on the North adopted at its founding conference, which claimed that the Provisionals were developing organs of direct democracy in Belfast; and its articles on the Northern elections and their aftermath, which called for a revival of dual power in a period of decline in the mass movement.

Another disturbing symptom was a certain tendency that persisted for many months of conceiving the role of a propaganda group in such a narrow and static way that it seemed virtually to exclude any activity and deny in practice the perspective of the group ever developing into a revolutionary party or even the nucleus of a revolutionary party. This tendency was all the more disturbing in that it would be the logical outcome of a tendency to view one or the other, or both republican organizations as an "adequate instrument," as an organization that could lead the Irish revolution without being fundamentally transformed both by the ideas and example



of revolutionary Marxists. Such a conception would relegate a Trotskyist propaganda group to a passive or auxiliary role. In particular, if "armed struggle" is "the key," it is natural for militants to conclude that small organizations have little role to play. The exciting and important thing is to become part of the "armed vanguard."

On a recent trip to Ireland, I found that one of the key contacts of the Irish comrades had drawn just this conclusion. He was a young radical from their milieu essentially who had joined the Provisionals and was apparently doing some good work in introducing political ideas into the organization. Although he liked the comrades' ideas about "the revolutionary role of the Provisionals," he was convinced that the RMG as such had no role to play. Of course, this was only one individual but the Irish comrades' political contacts in the Provisionals are not so many. And this attitude seemed to be a natural outgrowth of the IMG's line of praising the efficacy of "armed struggle" as such, divorced from the political work of organizing and educating the masses, a line that has been reflected to a considerable degree by the RMG since its inception.

Furthermore, the IMG's work in the solidarity movement in Britain does not seem to have won much respect for Trotskyists as such in the Provisionals. Since the British organization has not build anything in its own right but rather adapted to the Provisionals' politics, it seems that it will be the special needs of the Provisionals that will determine whether they have any use for Trotskyists or not—as a political catspaw. And they are most likely to need such an instrument while they are on the retreat rather than while they are on the advance. Therefore, it is extremely important for the Irish Trotskyists to see their work with the Provisionals in the context of the general situation and their long-term political tasks. Otherwise, the systematic work of building a section could be disrupted and diverted.

If the concrete context and perspectives are not kept in mind, our Irish comrades, in seeking to make a breakthrough in the "armed vanguard," can run into a deadly trap; that is, being pulled after the Provisionals into the kind of disaster that marked the end of the 1956-62 guerilla campaign. In the best of circumstances, they would find themselves committed to defending bankrupt policies at the very time they were being abandoned by the rest of the Irish vanguard and even the decisive forces in and behind the Provisionals.

In the event of more serious setbacks for the Provisionals, it will, of course, be all the more important to defend them—both to minimize the losses of militants and to get the chance to explain the reasons for the defeats and what must be done to rebuild the mass movement and lead it to victory in the next upsurge. But in the first place, no effective defense work can be done without a realistic assessment of the period and rigorous political discipline, which are completely incompatible with any concessions to ultraleftism. Secondly, political gains can only be made by putting forward a Marxist program.

Even in such simple matters as how a small group should function, the RMG seems to have suffered unduly from the education it has received from the IEC Majority

Tendency. In one discussion I attended it was seriously argued that the reason for the group's low level of activity was that the individual comrades had not read enough Marxist literature. This conclusion flowed from Comrade Mandel's pamphlet on the "Leninist Theory of Organization," which was quoted to support it: "The category of the Revolutionary party stems from the fact that Marxian socialism is a science which, in the final analysis, can only be assimilated in an individual and not a collective manner." The Irish comrades attempted to base themselves on this conception of Leninism. As a result, they missed one of the basic conceptions of Leninism. That is, even theoretical Marxism can usually be assimilated only through involvement in building the revolutionary party. Comrade Mandel's formulation opens the door to an individualist and intellectualist deviation that fits in well with relegating Trotskyists to the role of advisors to broader movements.

In the first place, sciences are not assimilated individually. Scientific learning is an eminently collective process. In this it differs notably from the literary disciplines. But what group of young Trotskyists anywhere—outside of those benefiting from the kind of advanced theory that emanates from the IEC Majority Tendency leaders in Western Europe—would get the idea that the elementary work of getting out the ideas and literature of Trotskyism depended on the individual study habits of the members? No effective revolutionary group can be built on such petty-bourgeois elitist principles, principles which at the same time as being elitist are "spontanéist" in the worst sense, in that they negate the political responsibility of leadership.

This approach is also reflected in the RMG's debate with the Stalinoid sect that has established a reputation in student left circles as being the most "serious Marxists." The RMG comrades correctly assessed this group as their most immediate rival. They realized that they had to establish themselves as the most respected source of Marxist ideas. But in this, they made the theoretical and political error of being drawn onto the ground of academic theorizing chosen by the Stalinoids (the BICO), into debates over the social history of the late medieval period in Scotland and Ireland and the details of Irish economic history. Aside from incidental errors, in debating the character of the Northern Protestant community and how it fitted into Irish national development, they did not keep the main political principle to the forefront. The question of whether or not the Protestants can be characterized as a nation is after all a rather academic one. The political question that must be answered is whether revolutionists should defend the right of the Protestants to self-determination. And the answer to that is absolutely clear. No. In the concrete circumstances, any distinct "Protestant" consciousness is pro-imperialist and reactionary through and through. To proclaim and defend the Leninist position on this question does not require any special theories about the nature of the Scottish reformism or a "unique Gaelic feudalism."

Furthermore, the concept of the revolutionary party requires that those who aspire to lead the working class take clear political positions and accept responsibility for them. But in both the propaganda and analysis of the IMG and the IEC Majority Tendency, there is a gen-



eral failure to keep the main principles clear and to the fore and a dismaying tendency for unexplained shifts to occur in orientation without discussion of what was wrong in the previous line or how such mistakes should be avoided in the future. The attempt to take an "understanding" attitude toward non-Marxist positions has resulted in "elliptical and synthetic" formulations and multiple "variants" that in the case of this young group have led on several occasions to the most dangerous political confusion.

### **'Seek Another Road'**

While the involved speculations and pretentious abstract formulas typical of the IEC Majority Tendency can prove attractive for a time in areas where young revolutionists live primarily on ideas and can function in a rather routine way (this, of course, can include exciting although stereotyped activities) the climate in Ireland is much severer. Ideas and theories are put to a rapid and stern test by the recurring crises and great political complexities. The method of the IEC Majority Tendency has led the IMG into abject confusion in its Irish work. The question then arises, since the RMG has received its training in Trotskyism to a large extent from the IMG and the IEC Majority Tendency, what future does it have? The answer is that if it continues to try to apply the method of the IEC Majority Tendency in Ireland, it has no future.

Not only can the empty generalities of the IEC Majority Tendency offer no guide to action in the difficult conditions the RMG faces, they will inevitably undermine and destroy such gains as the RMG has registered, primarily its understanding of the revolutionary dynamic of the struggle for democratic objectives such as national liberation and equality for women. The IEC Majority's adaptationist method will first disorient and demoralize the few young cadres that exist and then drive them away from Trotskyism altogether. It will prevent the RMG from projecting any clear program, from learning from concrete experience, from testing its ideas and line against the reality of the revolutionary struggle. In the last analysis, the IMG and the IEC Majority Tendency have failed the Irish Trotskyists as badly as their original teachers of the Healyite League for a Workers Republic.

But members of the RMG who have gone through an indigenous experience have some theoretical capital of their own, and that is primarily the experience of their political fight against the League for a Workers Republic. Although the League viewed itself as an irreconcilable opponent of adaptationism, it was in fact its mirror image. It had the same subjective method. In fact, I could not help being struck by the similarity of the arguments I had with the old leaders of the LWR and with some RMGers caught up in the logic of adaptationism. On the basis of a one-sided version of the past history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain and America, the LWR was determined to build a "proletarian" party. Only "working

class" issues could interest them. Anyone who talked about anything other than a "proletarian orientation" was obviously revisionist. The very fact that someone would talk this way was proof enough of that. Everything you said after it was determined that you were not talking about "going to the workers" now was just additional evidence of renegacy or at best a sharp debater's point. No matter what analysis was put forward, what facts were presented, or how many quotes from the Marxist classics could be produced to support an argument, it would have no effect. You were simply a revisionist and that was that.

The fact that the strike wave of the late sixties and the leftward movement of the Labour party dominated political life on the left in the period of their formation seemed to confirm their attitude. Their mistake was the notion that revolutionary activity had one definite style. That is, they thought in terms of shibboleths and not scientific analysis. A certain impression of the appearance of revolutionary activity blinded them to the actual process of the development of revolutionary opportunities.

The comrades adapting to ultraleftism and guerrillaism have similar reflexes. Slogans that can appeal to the masses just don't sound revolutionary. Participating in elections is reformist; calling for dual power is revolutionary. And what could be more revolutionary than "armed struggle"? Anyone who does not hail the Provisional guerrilla campaign is just a reformist, that's all.

Despite the "flexibility" of the theoreticians who discover and prove in such an impressive style that the real tradition of Marxism does not conflict with, but rather justifies ultraleft moods, these attitudes are no less obscurantist and dogmatic than those that destroyed the most promising cadres of the LWR. The basic cadres of the RMG have had a chance to learn from this example. The future of Trotskyism in Ireland in the next period depends on their ability to draw the conclusions from this.

But there is a limit to the number of times a young cadre can follow a false path and survive politically. The adaptationist line has already destroyed two revolutionary organizations in Latin American that numbered many times the Irish group; hundreds of heroic cadres have been lost to Trotskyism and no one knows how many opportunities wasted because of the adaptationist politics of the IEC Majority Tendency. Now the adaptationist tendency has begun to take its toll in Europe.

In Ireland, where the revolutionary movement is one of the most promising and at the same time one of the most vulnerable, we cannot afford to lose one Irish cadre. The logic of adaptationism there will be quick and deadly. And its results will not be limited to Ireland. It is imperative for the Irish comrades to "seek another road."

August 31, 1973