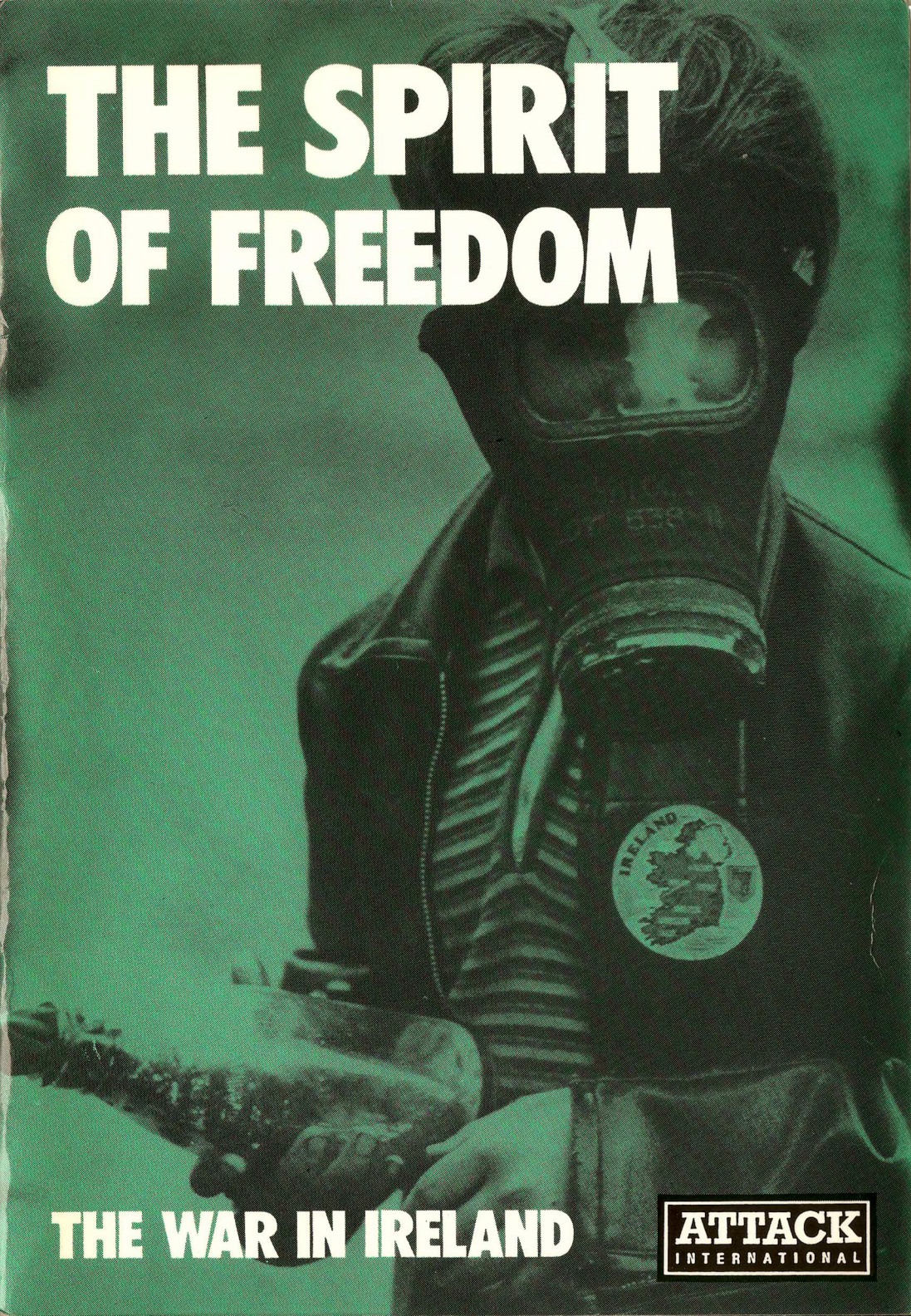


# THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM



THE WAR IN IRELAND

**ATTACK**  
INTERNATIONAL

(121)

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THE WAR IN IRELAND

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**"The great appear great because we are on our knees. Let us rise"**  
*(James Connolly)*

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# Introduction

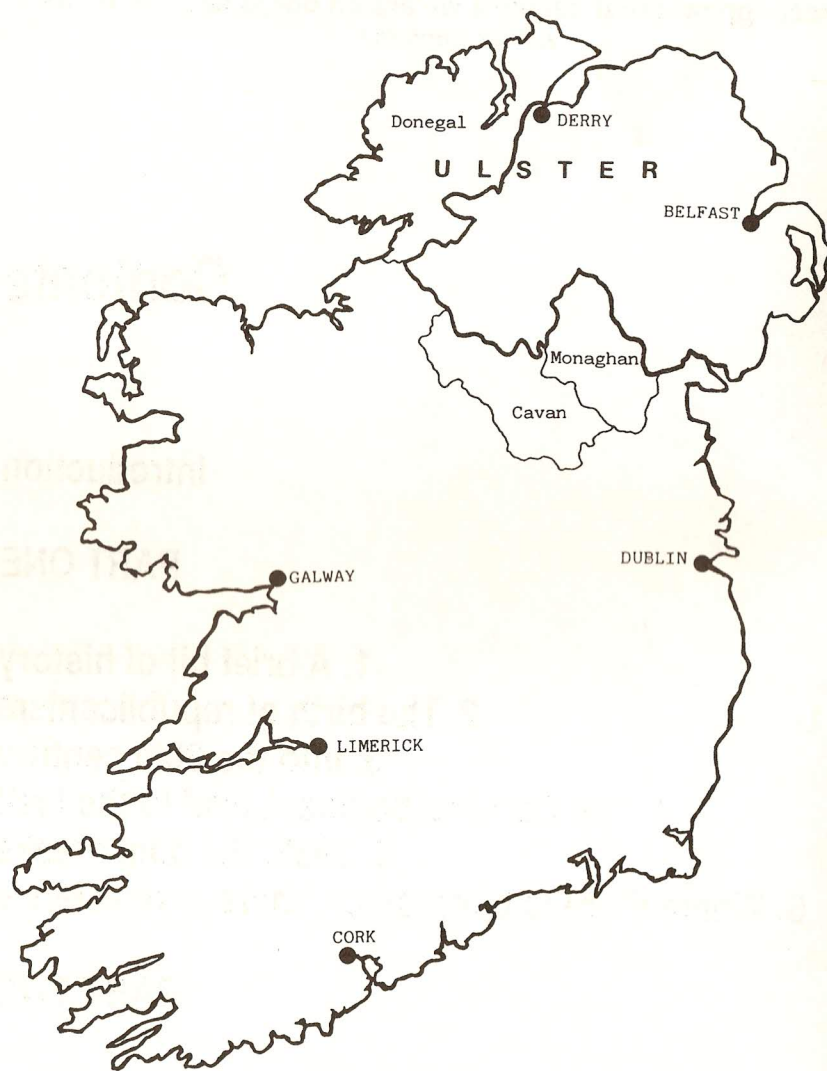
**"Ulster is not just another country. It is another planet."  
(The Sun')**

Ireland is never out of the news for long. Open a paper, switch on a TV, and there's bound to be some item about Ireland. And nine times out of ten, it's about the North of Ireland - or, in media-speak, "Ulster". But few of the millions of words and images that are churned out have attempted to tell the truth. Beneath the media hype, there is a real conspiracy of silence about Ireland. The media, aided and encouraged by politicians, have done their best to portray the conflict in the North as a law and order problem involving a handful of crazed terrorists and a religious feud. In the midst of all this, the British Army that patrols the streets is just a "peacekeeping" force.

All of this is a carefully engineered lie. The British state is not the upholder of justice and fair play. The Army does not exist to keep the peace. The aim of this booklet is to expose these and other myths - and to try to reveal the truth behind the lies of the media and their political controllers.

The longer we in Britain believe these lies, or just ignore Ireland in the hope that it will go away, the more we all have to lose. Ireland is not called Britain's 'testing ground' for nothing. But there is another side to the story. Repression has bred resistance. The last twenty years have been not so much twenty years of defeat, as twenty years in which working class republicans have refused to be defeated. The level of their resistance, their organisation and their resilience is an inspiration to us all. It's no surprise that the 6 Counties is the only area where the Poll Tax is not being introduced.

This booklet is not just an informative guide to Ireland; there is plenty we have had to leave out, which is why we have included a list of books at the back. More than anything, we want this booklet to be a guide to action. That's not to say that we have the 'correct' line on Ireland. But if there is a 'right' answer, we will only find it through struggle - struggle that leads to liberation on both sides of the Irish Sea and across the world.



● Ireland, showing the 6 county statelet of 'Northern Ireland', plus the counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal - part of the historic province of Ulster.



## ●Terminology

The war in Ireland has been fought as much with words as with bullets. In the capitalist media, republican paramilitaries are always "terrorists", while British soldiers and the armed RUC are simply "security forces." Obviously we have refused to use these loaded terms.

But the propaganda war has been subtle as well. Politicians and the media always talk about "Ulster" when they mean the statelet in the North-East of Ireland. In reality, that statelet includes only 6 of Ulster's 9 counties; the other three were dumped at the time of Partition because they contained too many Catholics. For the northern statelet we have therefore used the term "the 6 Counties".

Similarly, republicans do not refer to the state in the South as "the Republic." We have followed their logic and refer to it as "the 26 Counties" or, more sarcastically, as "the Free State."

Finally, where the text mentions "Britain" or "England", it refers to the British state or the British ruling class, unless it is clear that we mean only the geographical country. Occasionally, we may have strayed from these guidelines, but only for the sake of style.

# 1.

## A brief bit of history

British involvement in Ireland is nothing new. Quite simply Ireland was Britain's first colony. As far back as 1170 an army of a thousand men under the Earl of Pembroke invaded Ireland. The army was mostly made up of Norman mercenaries hoping to seize land and make a quick buck. The following year, the Pope (who just happened to be English) ratified the occupation by granting "the hereditary possession" of Ireland to the English King, Henry II. He immediately declared himself ruler of all Ireland.

By 1250 the Normans had overrun most of Ireland, but the native Gaels fought a non-stop guerilla war against their new rulers. Clearly no-one had bothered to tell them that Ireland now "belonged" to the English monarchy. As a result of their resistance, the invading English were effectively confined to Dublin and the small area surrounding it, known as 'The Pale'. But the Gaels continued to whittle away at the Pale: on the one hand, English settlers started adopting Gaelic customs; while on the other, the violent resistance of the Gaels stopped the plantation from getting any bigger.

Throughout the 15th century there were sporadic rebellions against British rule. In 1534 a well organised uprising was brutally crushed, setting the tone for the next 500 years. Ireland was now becoming important for strategic defence reasons: as long as it was occupied, no-one could use it as a launching pad for an attack on Britain. At the same time, Ireland also offered large areas of land that could be given to English nobles in return for their loyalty to the Crown.



So, for all these reasons, the English Crown waged a bloody war of conquest in Ireland throughout the 16th century. By the end, it controlled Leinster, Munster and Connacht, three of the island's four provinces. Only the province of Ulster remained an unbeaten Gaelic stronghold. Elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of peasants had been expelled from their land to make room for more profitable sheep farming.

By now, resistance to British rule wasn't just about kicking out foreign bosses. It had become a matter of basic survival. Of course, Irish peasants hadn't been living in luxury before the English invasion, but the system of basic subsistence farming they had used was a lot more suited to their needs. Now they were being kicked off their land and turned into travelling labourers. In 1598 two old Ulster clans, the O'Neill and the O'Donnell, led an all-out uprising against English rule. But by 1607 it too had been crushed. Its leaders went into exile rather than become managers of land that British nobles had seized and claimed as their own.

This sort of economic exploitation and military repression went hand in hand with attempts to impose a different culture on the native Gaels. Every aspect of Irish life came under attack, from religion to language, from traditions to social structure. In 1367 the British rulers banned the adoption of Irish names, customs or speech, as well as making it an offence to "harbour or encourage Irish minstrels, rhymers or tale-tellers". This process of anglicisation also took a more literal form. After the defeat of the O'Neill and O'Donnell uprising, six of Ulster's nine counties were systematically planted with English and Scottish settlers - all Protestant and all loyal to the Crown. Their loyalty arose from both economic and emotional links to the British ruling class. Whole districts were parcelled off to various Lords and to the merchant companies of London (which is why Derry became known as 'Londonderry'). The new settlers were given the best plots of land that had been seized. Local Irish nobles who had been loyal to the British were offered smaller areas. And those who had originally worked the land - the native Irish - were sold what little bits of land were left. By 1640 some 100,000 settlers had been imported, at a time when the whole island had a population of only just over a million.

But, as always, the conquest was not complete. In 1641 the Irish peasantry rose up again. An 8 year civil war started which only ended when Cromwell and his army invaded the island once more. Cromwell's reconquest was bloody and cruel, with notorious massacres at Drogheda and Wexford. One quarter of the Catholic population was killed. Hundreds of thousands of survivors were sold into slavery and shipped to the West Indies. The rest were driven west of the river Shannon on pain of death. Once more, the British state declared that Ireland was its property. Land was again parcelled out as payment to Cromwell's army : many of these plots were quickly sold, at a nice profit, to English absentee landlords. By the end of the civil war, more than 75% of cultivable land was in the hands of loyal Protestants. And even more native Irish peasants were no

longer freeholders but tenant farmers or, worse, serf-like labourers.

Towards the end of the 17th century, Irish peasants made another attempt to throw the British state off their backs. This time they allied themselves with James II, the deposed Catholic King of England. But James was defeated by the Protestant King William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne, on the 12th July 1690. The date is still celebrated by Loyalists in the 6 Counties as if it marked the final defeat of Catholic rebellion. It reinforces the image of Ireland as some obscure religious battleground. This is a myth: the conquest of Ireland was never centred on religion. Instead, religious differences were deliberately promoted as a smoke-screen so that British bosses could carry on accumulating profits. When Irish peasants and labourers fought back against British rule, they inevitably ended up fighting against the Catholic hierarchy too. At the Battle of the Boyne, it was the Protestant King William, and not James II, who had the Pope's blessing. After William's victory, hymns of thanksgiving were sung in Rome - a fact conveniently forgotten by Loyalists.



After King William's victory a series of Penal Laws were passed between 1695 and 1705. They were designed to create a system of apartheid where Catholics would forever be legally inferior. No Catholic could teach, no Catholic could vote, no Catholic could buy land or lease it for more than 31 years, and the male heir of a family could only inherit land if he converted to Protestantism. To underline these laws, it was made illegal for any Catholic to possess a firearm. The result was staggering. In 1641, before the Civil War, Catholics had owned 59% of Irish-owned land. A hundred years later, the figure had been slashed to a mere 7%. To be Irish, and a Catholic, was effectively a crime punishable by a life sentence of poverty, malnutrition and outright repression.

By now, Ireland was little more than an agricultural supplier to a British state which was busy building its bloody empire. Native Irish industries were suppressed in case they competed with British trading interests. Aspiring middle class Protestants were resentful about this stranglehold. As they saw it, they had fought the barbaric Catholic hordes and stayed loyal to the Crown; in return, they had got no reward except a kick in the



teeth. Meanwhile the mass of the Irish people were showing their own anger in a far more direct way. By 1760 bands of peasants, with names like the Oakboys and Whiteboys, were roaming the countryside attacking landowners and their henchmen. They tore down fences enclosing land, beat up rent collectors and assassinated landlords. Nearly 600 years of British occupation had not killed off popular Irish resistance.

## 2.

### The birth of republicanism

In 1791 the British state faced a new threat in Ireland: the Society of United Irishmen. Inspired by the French Revolution, the United Irishmen were a radical movement of Protestants and Catholics determined to break British rule, and prepared to use force if necessary. The 1790s had seen a rise in nationalist sentiments among middle class Protestants in Dublin and Belfast; they were angry that Westminster was still strangling native Irish business.

But the United Irishmen had a much more radical programme. Their best known leader was a Protestant barrister named Wolfe Tone. Tone realised that it was pointless fighting against British rule without, at the same time, fighting against the sectarian divisions fostered by the British state:

**"To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political evils and to assert the independence of my country - these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter - these were my means."**

This attempt to forge an alliance between Protestants and Catholics was political dynamite. The British were no fools: they knew they had to kill off the growing rebellion, and destroy the United Irishmen, Ireland's



first republican movement. So the British deliberately whipped up sectarian feelings between the United Irishmen and the Orange Order, a militant organisation founded to maintain Protestant supremacy. In 1798 the United Irishmen's attempt at an uprising was brutally crushed and some 50,000 republicans were executed as British soldiers wheeled mobile gallows across the Irish countryside.

But the United Irishmen were not simply defeated by the power of the British state. They also found themselves up against Irish landlords, the middle classes of Dublin and the Catholic Church. They were all just as terrified as the British by the threat of revolution and the thought of losing their property. Although the United Irishmen were beaten, republicans had learned a valuable lesson. As one of the leaders of the uprising put it: "The rich always betray the poor."

In 1800 the British state tried a different approach. It passed an Act of Union which declared that Ireland was no longer a colony but a part of the new "United Kingdom of Great Britain". The new Act of Parliament made no difference to most people in Ireland: the pattern of economic exploitation, social repression and military occupation carried on as before. But the Act of Union did have an impact in Ulster. By lifting restrictions on trade and industry, it allowed Belfast to prosper as a major industrial city. The Protestants of Ulster, who had always been relatively privileged, began to draw further apart from the rest of the Irish population. Of course, Ulster Catholics, concentrated in the South and West of the province, saw little of the new commercial and industrial expansion.

At this time, the Irish economy was still dominated by agriculture. The land was the main source of livelihood for most people. And that land was still owned by British or absentee Irish landlords. In actual fact, Ireland was a wealthy country. The only problem was that the wealth went straight over the water to Britain. In the 1830s, the total value of Ireland's agricultural production was £36 million. The Irish peasants, who had actually produced that value, received just £5 million. The rest went to merchants, landlords and middle-men. Life for the vast majority of Irish peasants was short, brutish and grim.

In the autumn of 1845 a potato blight reached Ireland. It quickly took hold and became the Great Famine. Over the next ten years some 3 million people starved to death or were forced to flee. A quarter of the population left their native country for ever. In 1845 there were some 8.5 million people living in Ireland. In 1920 the population stood at just 4.5 million. Even today, the figure is only little over 5 million.

But the potato blight hit other European countries too. So why did Ireland suffer so disastrously? The answer is obvious: as the saying has it, "God brought the blight, but it was England that caused the famine." In 1845 some 2.5 million acres of land were used for growing potatoes. Yet at the same time, there were over 4.5 million acres given over to grain-growing. The truth is that throughout the famine, Irish land actually produced bumper crops of oats, wheat, barley and vegetables. None of it

went into the mouths of Irish peasants. Instead the export of grain and cattle to Britain continued unchecked. Irish peasants died not for lack of food, but for lack of money to buy what they had themselves produced.

As resentment over the Famine grew, middle class Irish Catholics found they had a new outlet for their anger. For the Act of Union allowed Irish MPs to sit in the House of Commons in England for the first time. It wasn't long before a powerful nationalist movement developed. Because only well-off Catholics could vote, this movement for "Home Rule" was actually quite tame. What they meant by Home Rule was not complete independence from Britain, but a very limited and token form of self-government.

Even so, Ulster businessmen and the British ruling class saw this new movement as a threat to their prosperity. Although Home Rule MPs held the balance of power in Parliament, their moves for Home Rule were blocked time and time again by Ulster Unionists, the Conservative Party and the House of Lords. Beneath the veneer of democracy, there was as much greed and arrogance as ever.



The result of this intransigence was that by the end of the 19th century, the patience of most Irish Catholics was wearing thin. Most Irish MPs were now supporters of Home Rule, but it was clear that the British had no intention of giving up their little money-spinner. And it was equally clear that putting MPs into Parliament was not going to get them anywhere. The movement for Home Rule, always a little shaky, began to dis-integrate.



On the one side were the constitutional middle class nationalists like Charles Parnell, a wealthy landowner and leader of the Home Rule Party. Parnell and his allies wanted Ireland to be run by Irish bosses, not British ones. They were sincerely appalled at the thought of rebellion or revolution. But no matter how moderate the middle class nationalists tried to appear, they were hated and feared by the Ulster bosses and their masters in Britain. Parnell's own political career, for example, was destroyed by the press when they discovered he was having an affair with a married woman.

On the other side, meanwhile, were those who saw Parnell and his friends as too tame. For a time, Parnell tried to ride on the back of this more militant nationalism. He used the threat of violent rebellion to lend weight to his backroom negotiations. But before long, he was condemning them as viciously as any British politician. Like the rest of the Irish middle class, the only change Parnell wanted was in the accent of the bosses.

One of the more militant groups was a fiercely separatist organisation called Sinn Fein. The name means roughly "Ourselves Alone", and it stood uncompromisingly for total Irish independence. Sinn Fein drew strength from two movements that had grown massively in the second half of the 19th century. First the Gaelic revival which had tried to restore native Irish culture and so revitalise Irish politics. And second, the Irish Republican Brotherhood ("the Fenians"). The IRB were unashamed revolutionaries, dedicated to liberating Ireland from British rule by any means. For the first time, the IRB took the struggle to England itself, rescuing two imprisoned comrades in Manchester and bombing a detention centre in London.

Although Sinn Fein was strongly nationalist, it had a rather vague political outlook. Peasants, workers, small farmers and middle class businessmen all mixed in the same organisation. Arthur Griffiths, Sinn Fein's founder, even put forward a "buy Irish" policy in an attempt to win the support of middle class nationalists. This was a non-starter while Irish workers and peasants lacked the money to buy hardly anything. Meanwhile, others were pointing out that a national revolution without a social revolution would be meaningless. As the 19th century drew to a close, socialist sentiments grew in strength, especially in the big industrial cities of Belfast and Dublin. James Connolly, one of the leading activists, argued tirelessly that the struggle to control Ireland's resources could not be separated from working class struggles for a different society: "We cannot imagine a subject Ireland with a free working class, nor can we imagine a free Ireland with a subject working class."

Sinn Fein, socialism and Fenianism: it was a volatile mixture in a country where the working class was steeped in republican tradition and well-acquainted with armed rebellion.

# 3.

## Into the 20th century

As the 20th century began, the twin strands of nationalism and socialism became even more intertwined. They were given a boost by events both in Britain and around the world. At Westminster a Home Rule Bill was again introduced in 1912 - partly as a result of parliamentary pressure, and partly in order to defuse the growing Irish struggle. The Bill provoked the usual fierce reaction from the ruling class. The leader of the Conservative Party, Bonar Law, opposed the Bill and declared that "there are things stronger than parliamentary majorities." It was a rare admission that British bosses would ditch democracy rather than risk losing their investment over the water: it showed the reality of state power behind the facade of democracy. Meanwhile in Ireland itself, the Loyalists openly organised military resistance to the Bill. The final blow to the very mild Home Rule proposals came when the British Army refused to obey an order to put down any Loyalist insurrection, the so-called "Castlereagh Mutiny".

The whole episode was an excellent lesson in where real power lies: not in Parliament, but in the hands of the boss class. It was yet more proof that the constitutional path followed by the middle class nationalists was a dead-end. The only solution was for the Irish working class to organise themselves.

At the same time, the radical republicans were given a further boost by the dramatic upsurge in strikes and disturbances all around the world in the years leading up to the First World War. The great 1907 strike in Bel-



fast united Protestant and Catholic workers in a bitter battle for better wages and the right to organise. More than 100,000 workers turned out to support the strike wave which began in the docks. The strike was broken, not by sectarianism, but by the terrified British leaders of the dockers' union. The last thing they wanted was a threat to their cosy relations with management.

Dublin witnessed a huge wave of strikes in 1913, as native Irish bosses tried to kill off the new-born trade unions. The city's employers banded together in a powerful federation led by the richest man in Dublin, who happened to be the owner of a pro-Home Rule newspaper. The bosses locked out the tram-workers, so workers throughout the city retaliated by coming out on strike. At its height the strike involved some 50,000 workers, half of the city's working population. British workers were quick to support their Irish brothers and sisters, raising money and sending food. But when British railway workers went on solidarity strike, they were ordered back to work by their own union leaders. The Dublin strikers were eventually beaten after six months, but only after they had seen nationalist bosses, the Home Rule Party, the Catholic Church and Sinn Fein leaders all collaborating with Unionist forces in a bid to break the strike. It was proof that James Connolly was right:

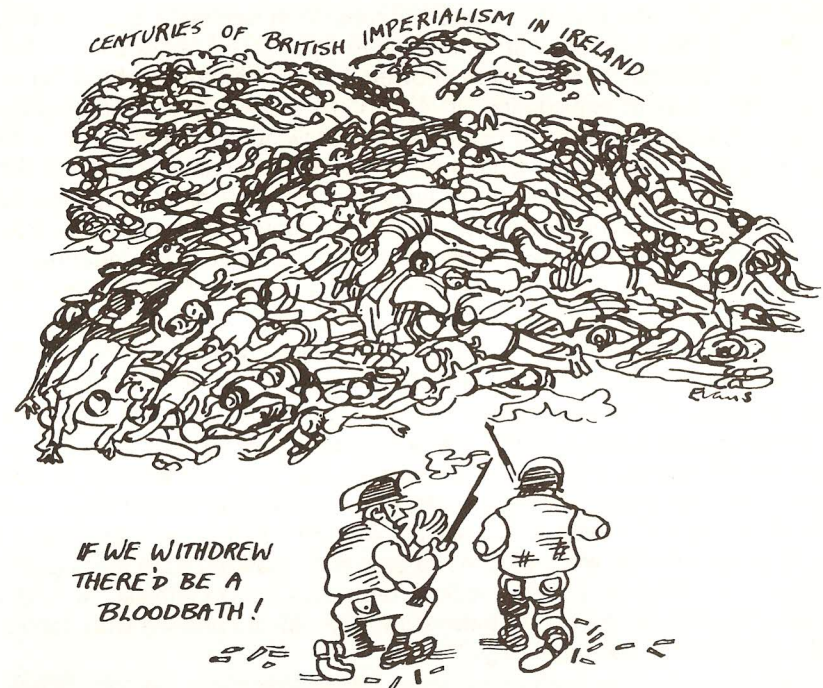
"If you remove the English Army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic, your efforts would be in vain."

When Britain entered the bloodbath of the First World War, the middle class nationalists urged their fellow Irish to volunteer for the British Army. Like fools they hoped they would get Home Rule as a reward for their slavish loyalty to the Crown. Others, more radical, saw that "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity" and resolved to seize their chance. On Easter Monday, 24th April 1916, a group of 150 armed men and women stormed the General Post Office in Dublin, and declared that Ireland was now an independent sovereign state. The Easter Rising had begun. It was a brave attempt at insurrection, inspired by a confusing mixture of motives. One of its leaders, Padraig Pearse, believed that "the old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields." This sort of spiritual mumbo-jumbo was more than offset by other elements in the Rising: the old physical-force republicanism of the Fenians, and the working class socialism of Connolly's Irish Citizen Army.

The authorities were taken by surprise, but they soon re-organised, and one by one the rebel strongholds fell. Within a week, the rising had been crushed. Some 450 soldiers and civilians were killed in the fighting, and more than 2,600 wounded. Without mass, active and organised support from Irish workers, the Rising had been doomed from the start against the might of the British state. One hundred and fifty rebels storming a post office was no substitute for 150,000 workers starting a revolution.

The British state was quick to get its revenge. Some 3,500 republicans

were arrested and half of them were deported to be interned in England. Within days, 14 of the leaders of the Rising were savagely executed. Connolly himself was so badly wounded that he had to be tied to a chair before he could be shot. As the real face of British rule was revealed yet again, popular support for the Rising grew dramatically. Within a year, nationalist sentiments had been transformed into republican, revolutionary sentiments. The nationalist population were no longer satisfied with the promise of limited Home Rule within the British Empire. All faith in the British Parliament had been destroyed. Connolly and the rebels might have been killed, but they hadn't died in vain.



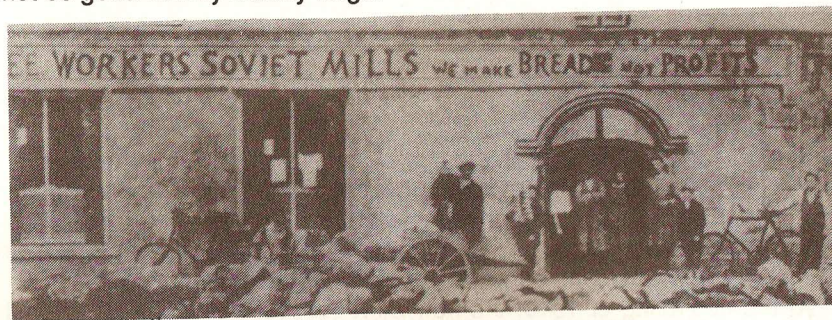
In the December 1918 elections, a more radical Sinn Fein swept the boards. They won 73 seats while the Nationalists took a sorry total of just six - and four of these were in seats not contested by Sinn Fein! More importantly, of the 73 Sinn Fein MPs, 36 were serving prison sentences for republican activities. It was a massive endorsement for republican politics: Sinn Fein candidates had campaigned on a pledge not to take up their seats in Parliament, but to set up an Irish Parliament instead.

At the beginning of 1919, the new Sinn Fein MPs duly set up an Irish Parliament (the Dail) and declared independence. More importantly, on



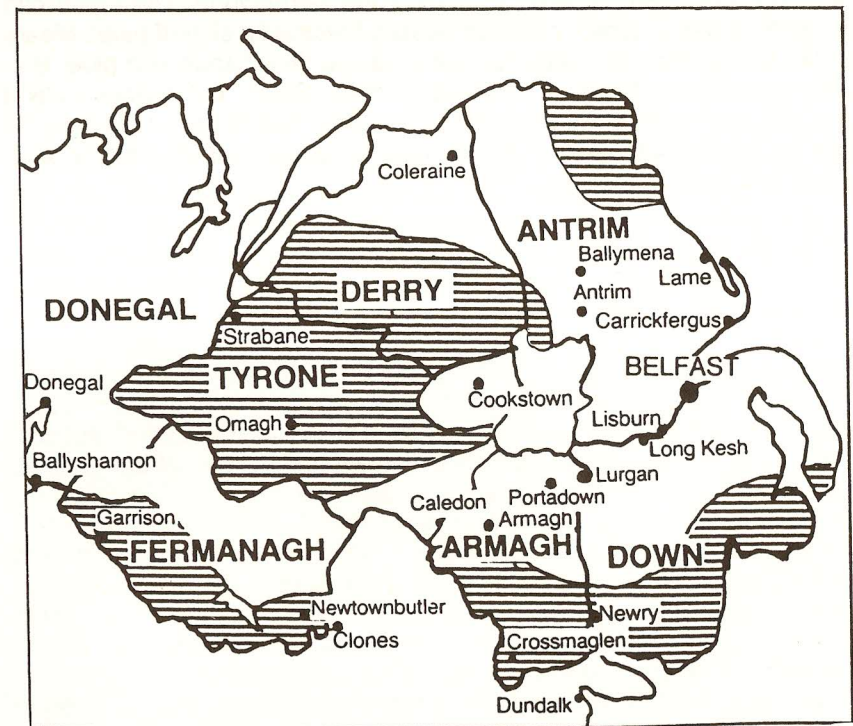
the same day, an unofficial war of liberation was launched by the Irish Volunteers (soon to be known as the Irish Republican Army). They ambushed troops and police, and the fighting escalated. The British response was to introduce a curfew, and the notorious Black and Tans started their systematic campaign of murder, rape and arson against the nationalist communities. Between 1920 and 1921 more than 800 houses and 900 shops were destroyed by such British forces. Dozens of republican sympathisers were gunned down in cold blood, and many more jailed and tortured. In Ulster, the B-Specials were created - a special paramilitary constabulary of 'loyal' citizens. Needless to say, they were entirely Protestant and recruited from the original Ulster Volunteer Force and the Orange Order.

But the IRA, now with the support of most Irish peasants and workers, fought back fiercely against British state sponsored terrorism. At the same time, thousands of workers showed their own intention of putting an end to centuries of exploitation. In April 1918 there was a general strike against conscription. And in Limerick the following year there was a 12 day general strike against British military rule. It became known as the Limerick Soviet. Elsewhere, there were mass strikes and stoppages all over the country, even in Belfast. The British state was particularly worried that the growing class consciousness in the Belfast engineering industry might lead to a link between the strikers (led by a Catholic) and the republican rebellion. In May 1920 there was a general strike in support of 100 republican prisoners on hunger strike in Mountjoy prison. In Knocklong, the workers took over the creamery there, and set up the Knocklong Soviet Creamery with the declaration that "we make butter not profits." In September, the entire port of Cork was taken over and run as a Soviet. Republican leaders and trade union bosses had told Irish workers to hold back their demands until after independence. But it looked more and more like the Irish revolt was spilling over into full-blooded class war. In some areas the IRA were ordered to stop rural workers from seizing and confiscating land. But many radical republicans sympathised with the growing revolution. As one of them said, "the new Ireland we work for will not be governed by money-bags."



● Soviet in Limerick, August/September 1921.

Of course, these developments scared the hell out of middle class nationalists. Independence was one thing, but class struggle and revolution were different altogether. They could see their dreams of an Irish capitalism slipping away. They were desperate to reach an agreement with the British so that normal service (i.e. exploitation) could be resumed as soon as possible. The British state too knew that it could not win the war, and that somewhere along the line some sort of 'concession' would have to be made. On 6th December 1920 agreement was finally reached and the Government of Ireland Act was passed. The next year, partition took place: Ireland was divided into two separate artificial statelets. Six counties in the North-East (Derry, Antrim, Fermanagh, Down, Tyrone and Armagh) were to be split off from the rest of the country and would remain part of Britain. These six counties became known as 'Ulster', although three Ulster counties with large Catholic populations (Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan) were not included in it. The remaining 26 counties of Ireland were granted limited independence, and became known as 'The Free State'. The name was, and is, a sick joke.



● The North of Ireland, showing predominantly Catholic areas.



Several moderate republicans, like Michael Collins, supported the Treaty, arguing that Ireland was tired of war and that limited independence for three quarters of the country was better than nothing at all. Over half of the IRA disagreed and resolved to ignore the new border and continue the struggle. But they were hampered by their own lack of vision - a leading IRA member at the time, who fought against the Treaty, had this to say about the anti-Treaty forces: "All they stood for was that they would not accept the Treaty; they had no alternative programme. They were the stuff that martyrs are made of, but not revolutionaries, and martyrdom should be avoided. We had a pretty barren mind socially; many on the republican side were against change...pure ideals were used as a mask and blinkers to direct the movement away from revolution." This problem is still to be solved. Meanwhile the Irish middle class, backed up by the British state, prepared to defend their new 'Free State' against the anti-Treaty republicans. This was the start of the Civil War, a period of bitter fighting which still divides republican families today. By March 1923 the republicans and revolutionaries had been worn down and defeated by superior firepower. The 26 Counties, born out of the blood of Irish workers, had now been baptised in more of the same blood. The republican movement was crushed, and Irish bosses breathed a sigh of relief. Meanwhile, across the sea, British bankers rubbed their hands with glee. Britain might have withdrawn politically from the South, but economically it was still very much pulling the strings. Connolly had been proved right: he had foreseen that partition would lead to "a carnival of reaction both North and South."

## 4. The Carnival begins: Loyal to the last!

The British state had not kept hold of this new 6-county statelet for sentimental reasons. Since the Industrial Revolution, the North-East had been the economic powerhouse of Ireland. Belfast was a major industrial centre with massive engineering and ship-building works. For the British bosses, these were profits that could not be thrown away. And for the Protestant middle class, these profits were dependent on remaining part of Britain for the trade and raw materials it could provide. The stakes, as ever, were high.

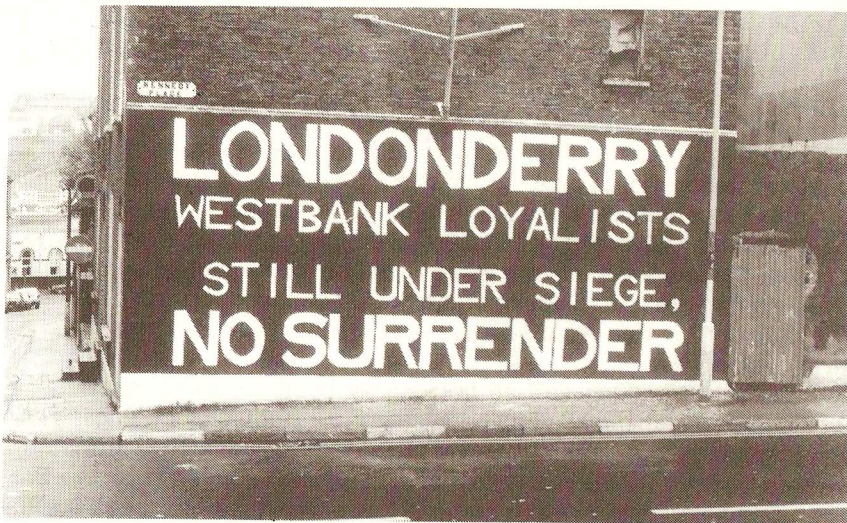
But the Ulster province had traditionally been the most rebellious. It was because of this that it had been so heavily planted by by English and Scottish Protestants in the 17th century. The divisions between the new settlers and the native population were deliberately widened by the British. Long before South Africa became news, apartheid had been institutionalised in Ulster. The British needed to ensure the loyalty of the Protestant workforce. They did this by granting them very minor economic privileges and, more importantly, by spreading the illusion that Protestants were somehow vastly superior to Catholics. This belief, better known as 'Orangeism' is formalised in the Orange Order.

Its ideology and practice, despite being based on religion, was and still is nothing more than blatant racism: dividing and ruling to the tune of profit. And, like all forms of racism, Orangeism was the product of the rulers, not the ruled. As one British commander said in 1795, "I have arranged... to increase the animosity between the Orangemen and the Unit-



ed Irishmen." Loyalism was also developed against the threat of revolt from working class Protestants, as well as from Catholics. The false feelings of superiority bought off the former, while the latter were isolated and crushed.

This unholy alliance between Protestant workers and their bosses has been amazingly successful. Despite immense poverty and exploitation, Protestant workers in the 6 Counties have on the whole stuck by their bosses through thick and thin. Of course, being in the Orange Order was often the only way for Protestant workers to get a job. But submissiveness to their bosses has gone hand in hand with violent sectarianism towards Catholics. There were anti-Catholic riots in Ulster in 1835, 1843, 1857, 1864, 1872, 1880, 1884, 1886 and 1898. Pogroms against Catholics were a regular thing, usually after July 12: the annual celebration of King William's victory over the Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne. In 1913 the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was established, with 100,000 armed Protestants united behind such catchy slogans as 'No Surrender', 'Remember 1690' and 'Home Rule is Rome Rule'.



● The blinkered and reactionary face of Loyalism.

And then came Partition in 1921: a combination of British ruling class cunning, the vehemently anti-revolutionary Irish middle class, and reactionary Orangeism. The partition was blatantly political: 3 of Ulster's 9 counties were dumped to ensure that the new statelet had an in-built Protestant majority. And the border itself ran like a drunkard's walk, splitting up homes and farms, all in order to maintain Loyalist supremacy and the profits of British bosses.

The new province started out as it had begun. There were serious sectarian riots in Belfast and Derry between 1920 and 1922. More than 250 Catholic nationalists were murdered by the Loyalist terror. Some 23,000 people were left homeless. And 12,000 workers were driven from their jobs, a quarter of them Protestant socialists. In 1922 the IRA were outlawed, and up to 1000 known republicans were interned without trial. For nationalists, voting against such blatant repression was a waste of time: most were too poor to qualify for a vote in any case, and the voice of the rest of them went unheard. In 1920 nationalists controlled 25 out of the 80 local councils in the North. At the next local elections in 1924, that figure had dropped to just two. The Loyalists had fixed electoral boundaries to ensure their own continued supremacy. The new statelet's first Prime Minister declared: "All I boast is that we have a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people." The most blatant example of this 'gerrymandering' was in Derry ('Londonderry' as Loyalists insist on calling it). As late as 1966, while Catholics outnumbered Protestants in the city by two to one, the City Corporation was still run by Unionists. The 6 Counties had become the Orange State.

Yet despite this, there were still moments when the mass of the Northern population realised their common interests and their common enemy. In 1932 there were mass demonstrations and riots against proposed changes in the Poor Laws. Thousands of workers, Protestant and Catholic, had been reduced to starvation by the depression which took unemployment up to 30%. While middle class Loyalists were tied to Britain and the new statelet by economic interests, it was different for poorer Protestants. It was hard to believe in the myths of Orangeism when Protestant bosses rode around in big cars while workers of both religions lived in crap housing and struggled to make ends meet. At times like this, Protestant workers realised that, for them, sectarianism only meant 'tuppence ha'penny looking down on tuppence.' But this working class unity was fragile and short-lived. Loyalist leaders were scared by thought of the artificial barriers of religion and politics falling down. So they represented the demonstrations as a republican communist plot, and at the same time took the wind out of their sails by doubling the relief rates for the unemployed. Brute force and token economic reforms saved the day. By 1935, things were back to 'normal' as 11 Catholics died in sectarian rioting.

Over the next fifty years, little changed. In 1933, Sir Basil Brooke, a future Prime Minister of the 6 Counties, boasted that "I have not a Roman Catholic about my own place." That level of systematic discrimination was crystallised in Harland and Wolff shipbuilders. By 1970 they were the biggest source of employment in Belfast, with a workforce of over 10,000. Yet just 400 were Catholic. The 6 Counties came to resemble a Third World country rather than a part of Western Europe. A 1939 survey found that 36% of the North's population lived in conditions of absolute poverty, without enough money to buy food, clothes and fuel. The vast majority of that 36% were Catholic: to be Catholic was to be poor.



If institutionalised discrimination didn't get you, then the systematic brutality surely would. Economic exploitation was backed up by a virtual police state, with a Special Powers Act that was famous the world over. The Act allowed arrest without charge, internment without trial, prohibition of meetings, organisations and publications, and gave complete authority to the Minister for Home Affairs. The South African Minister for Justice said he would willingly "exchange all the legislation of that sort (in South Africa) for one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act." To enforce these vicious laws, the Orange State used the Specials and the RUC, both almost exclusively Protestant and violently Loyalist. The B-Specials, although part-time, had 24 hour access to guns and ammunition, and were quick to exploit this. Sectarian attacks were a constant feature of life.



The 6 county state was built on the idea that it could only survive if working class Catholics were crushed. British profits made repression necessary; Loyalism made it possible. And if abstract notions like 'justice' and 'democracy' got in the way, they had to be ditched. As Ian Paisley admits: "I would rather be British than just." When George Seawright stood up in a council meeting and said "taxpayers' money would be better spent on an incinerator and burning the lot of them", it wasn't surprising that a leading Loyalist politician wanted to exterminate all Catholics. What was surprising was that he had admitted it so openly.

In the face of this level of discrimination and repression, the silence from the British labour movement over the water was deafening.

# 5.

## 1969: the dam breaks

By the early 1960s it looked as though the Loyalists had been set up in power for life. The political machinery of the statelet was in their complete control. And despite the blatant discrimination, few voices were raised in protest. The nationalist minority in the North had been effectively crushed.

But there was a cloud looming on the horizon: the economy of the North-East was in deep difficulties. These problems prompted the Loyalists to appoint a new Prime Minister in 1963, Captain Terence O'Neill. O'Neill was a technocrat, more interested in solving the economic problems than beating the Unionist drum. He had a reputation for making reforms, and in 1965 he met the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of the 26 Counties. In terms of Protestant politics, this was little short of a miracle.

But while O'Neill raised some hopes among nationalists, many Loyalists saw him as a despicable traitor. It was this feeling of betrayal that led to the rise of men like Ian Paisley and Gusty Spence. Paisley was a violently anti-Catholic preacher: he still insists on referring to the Pope as "the Anti-Christ". But despite his right-wing politics, he appealed to Protestant workers angered by the "O'Neillist fur-coat brigade". Meanwhile, Spence turned Paisley's form of national socialism into reality. He led a group called the Ulster Volunteer Force in a series of random and murderous attacks on Catholics in 1966. O'Neill and other well-heeled Loyalists were quick to condemn Spence, but it was their statelet that had created him. And as the 1970s and 1980s were to show, Spence was not



an isolated psychopath, but a representative of a strong and vicious tradition within Loyalism.

At the end of the day, O'Neill's fine-sounding words were just so much hot air. Even if he had really wanted reforms, it just wasn't possible. Discrimination, gerrymandering, the Special Powers Act: all these were built into the very heart of the Orange state. So nothing changed, and nationalist anger grew. The post-war education reforms had produced a new Catholic middle class. Now they were growing up and starting to chafe at the bit. The constitutional nationalist parties were doing nothing to end discrimination. And of course the 1960s was the decade of resistance and rebellion, from South Africa to the United States. In fact, to the nationalists, it looked like everyone was rising up against repression - apart from them.

Nationalist frustration showed itself in the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), founded in 1967 by a coalition of different groups. The demands of NICRA were modest to say the least: one man, one vote in council elections; an end to gerrymandered electoral boundaries; machinery to prevent discrimination by public authorities and to deal effectively with complaints; fair allocation of public housing; repeal of the Special Powers Act; and disbanding of the RUC's paramilitary reserve, the B-Specials.



In every other European country, these rights were taken for granted. The fact that the nationalists were still calling for them was a clear sign of the brutal discrimination that lay at the heart of the 6 county statelet. And the response from that state to these moderate and modest demands was final proof that 'reform' was impossible. There was no way that the Loyalists could have conceded the central demand of 'one man one vote': it would have threatened their sectarian state and all the privileges it had brought them.

And so civil rights marches were banned and batonned. On one march in Derry, in October 1968, at least 77 marchers were seriously injured by the police assault. But many working class nationalists felt that they had nothing to lose. All the more so, because they were bearing the brunt of the economic crisis. The following month, 15,000 people marched in Derry. And as the pace quickened, the nationalist middle class began to back off, frightened by a 'monster' they could no longer control.

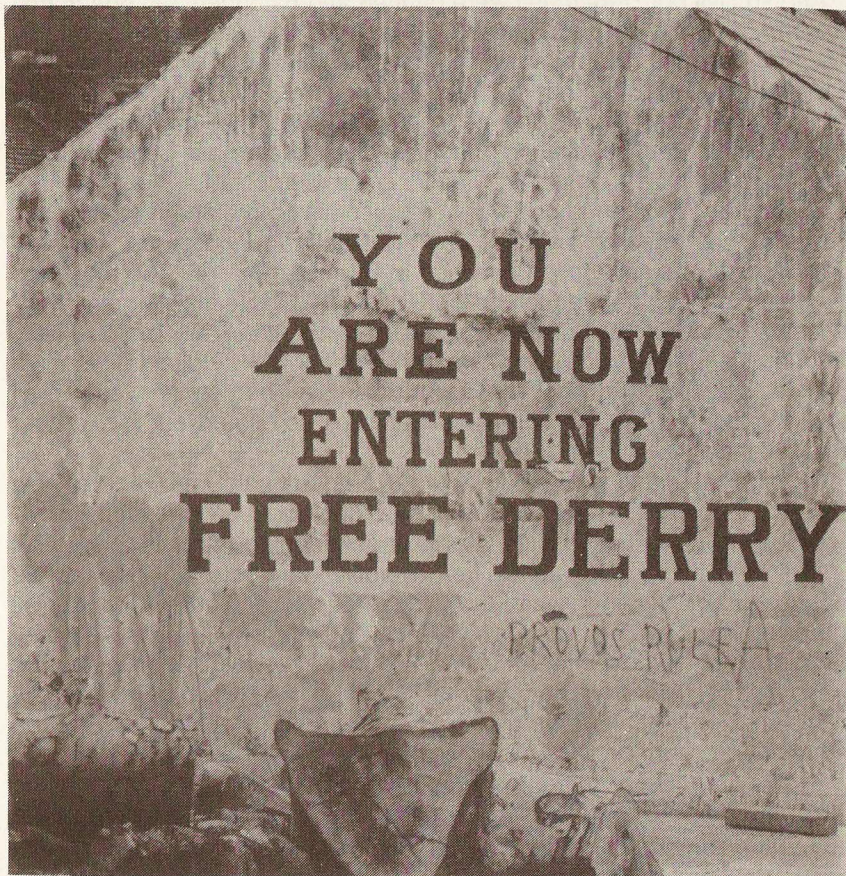
By January 1969, the positions were becoming more and more clear. A Belfast-to-Derry march organised by the small left-wing group, People's Democracy, was savagely ambushed at Burntollet Bridge. The marchers had been led into the ambush by the RUC; and despite inflicting heavy injuries, not one of the attackers was arrested. When the march finally reached Derry, they received a heroes' welcome in the Bogside, the main Catholic ghetto in the city. That night, makeshift barricades went up all over the Bogside as working class Catholics screamed out their anger and defiance.

O'Neill's response was predictable: "We have heard sufficient for now about civil rights" he said, "Let us hear a little about civic responsibility." For working class nationalists, this was only adding insult to injury. But O'Neill was also under attack from hardline Loyalists who demanded tougher action against what they regarded as a 'Fenian/Communist' threat. Tension was increased in March and April 1969 by a series of bombs which wrecked electricity pylons and reservoir pipelines. The press and politicians blamed the attacks on the IRA (which barely existed at the time), but it later emerged that they were the work of the UVF in a bid to put pressure on O'Neill and whip up more anti-Catholic fervour.

By this time, Derry was the scene of frequent rioting against the hated RUC. In mid-April a demonstration to protest at the failure to prosecute any of the Burntollet Bridge attackers exploded into fierce rioting. Stones and petrol bombs were hurled at RUC columns as they tried to force their way past the barricades. The RUC managed to break into several houses, and in one of them they severely beat a 43 year old man, Samuel Devenney. He never recovered from his injuries and died three months later in July 1969, the first civilian casualty of the recent 'troubles'. Meanwhile, as the RUC besieged the Bogside, many nationalists called family and friends in Belfast and asked them to do something to take the pressure off Derry. The Catholic ghettos of West Belfast didn't need to be told twice.



The crisis was now spinning out of control. On the 12th August 1969, the traditional Apprentice Boys' Parade was due to be held in Derry. It was, and is, an annual celebration of Loyalist domination. After the experience of the last year, the Derry nationalists were in no mood to accept this sort of provocation. There was the real danger that nationalist areas might once again be attacked and invaded by the RUC and Loyalist mobs. In July, the Bogside Defence Association was formed to prepare for the defence of their homes and their lives.



The attitude of the state was clear. After a year of banning civil rights marches, the Apprentice Boys' Parade was given the go-ahead. The inevitable happened. Fighting broke out between the Loyalist parade and nationalists, and uncontrollable rioting quickly engulfed the Bogside. For the residents of this Derry ghetto, there was no choice: they had to defend their homes and their community. And this they did, with torrents of petrol bombs and an elaborate scheme of barricades. They declared 'Free Derry': it was to last for 3 whole years.

## Some Questions and Answers

*Q. Trooper Herbert McCabe was the first British soldier killed in the present round of troubles. He was shot dead while home on leave in the Divis Flats in Belfast in August 1969. Who killed him?*

*A. He was shot dead by the RUC. They fired indiscriminate bursts of machine-gun fire into the flats, killing Trooper McCabe and nine year old Patrick Rooney.*

*Q. In October 1969, Constable Victor Arbuckle was the first RUC man to be killed in the present round of troubles. Who killed him and why?*

*A. He was shot dead by Loyalists on the Shankill Road as they protested against the proposed disbanding of the B-Specials.*

*Q. The first systematic bombing campaign of the present round of troubles was carried out in 1969. It was aimed at the electricity and water supplies in Belfast. Who carried it out and why?*

*A. It was carried out by the UVF. They hoped that the IRA would be blamed (which they were) and that hardened unionist opinion would force the 'moderate' Prime Minister to resign (which it did).*

*Q. In 1969, a prominent politician in the North of Ireland said the British Army were like the SS. Who was he?*

*A. The Reverend Ian Paisley, before he realised the true role of the British Army.*

*Q. In 1970, two pieces of legislation were introduced to deal with the growing crisis: the Criminal Justice Act which provided a mandatory 6 month sentence for rioting, and the Incitement to Religious Hatred Act which outlawed explicit sectarianism. One of the first victims of the first Act was a Belfast docker who was writing something on the wall: what did he write? And how many people were charged under the second Act?*

*A. John Benson wrote "No Tea Here" to show he would give no tea to British soldiers. And one person was charged under the Incitement to Religious Hatred Act. And they were acquitted.*

*Q. An inquiry by Scotland Yard detectives into the death of Samuel Devenney was called off because of a 'conspiracy of silence' by the men who had attacked him. A Westminster MP was sentenced to six months in jail for defending the area from the men who had attacked Devenney. What was the area? Who was the MP? Who were the men who attacked Devenney?*

*A. The Bogside in Derry. Bernadette Devlin. The RUC.*



harassment and brutal repression. For 50 years, they had been sullenly resentful, but cowed. But now all this was gone, smashed by the events of 1969. The injustice and mass poverty were still there, but now there was organised resistance to Loyalism and imperialism. The dam had been broken: and having found their voice, the nationalist working class were not going to be silenced again.

# 6.

## Where there is oppression, there is resistance

The tradition of resistance in Ireland is as old as the history of British imperialism. But from the early 1920s to the 1960s, republicanism existed in name only. In the South, the 26 county state was more interested in capital investment and trade with Britain than in the conditions of the working class ghettos of the North. In the 6 Counties, there were sporadic IRA campaigns, the occasional march or demonstration.

But the explosion of 1969 changed all that, and put republicanism back on the agenda. The residents of the Bogside, the Falls Road and elsewhere were no longer prepared to accept their impoverished lot: they wanted to smash Loyalism and break free from British rule. But the IRA scarcely existed in the 6 Counties. It had few members, even fewer arms and was in no position to defend nationalist areas from growing attacks by the RUC and Loyalist gangs. A famous piece of graffiti appeared on the Falls Road: "IRA = I Ran Away".

Between 1956 and 1962 the IRA had tried to launch a military campaign along the border. The effort failed, and the leadership of the IRA decided to re-assess their whole strategy. They came up with a new idea which they hoped would win them popular support. It's known as the 'stages' theory. The aim in Stage One was to achieve 'full democracy' in both states, north and south of the border. There was to be no attempt to challenge partition. Stage Two was the creation of a united capitalist Ireland. And then, years into the future, in Stage Three capitalism would finally be overthrown. Even today, there are still some people who believe



this crap. The net result of all this theorising was that when the nationalist areas of the 6 Counties rose up, the IRA were nowhere to be seen. Their guns were gathering dust, and they were down in Dublin reading books.

So it was in no surprise when the IRA split into two in January 1970. Those who had opposed the drift away from military activity left to form the Provisional IRA. The Provisionals were initially a strange mixture of traditional gunfighters full of notions based on sentimental romance and young working class kids, battle hardened by the riots of 1969-70. Shortly afterwards, Provisional Sinn Fein was likewise created. These two organisations still survive, although after 20 years of existence they're not usually called "Provisional". The Official IRA and its supporters have by and large disappeared into the dustbin of history.

But the pace in the North-East of Ireland was still being set by working class nationalists. As the true role of the British Army became more obvious, it was Molotov cocktails and not cups of tea that were handed out to them. The Army were quick to retaliate. In July 1970 they imposed a curfew on the nationalist Falls Road in West Belfast. Troops saturated the area and rampaged through it, killing 5 Catholic civilians.

By the beginning of 1971 the Provisional IRA had started to hit back. On 6th February 1971 they killed a British soldier for the first time. In a war that was now out in the open, young working class Catholics flocked to join the Provos. The nationalist resistance grew from strength to strength, and Army repression only united working class Catholics around the IRA. By this stage, two years after the troops had been sent in, the situation was even more out of control than it had been in 1969. The Unionist government demanded the introduction of internment.

On 6th August 1971 British troops swept into nationalist areas at 4:30 in the morning. In all 342 people were dragged off to be interned (imprisoned without charge or trial) in special concentration camps. Most were civil rights campaigners, old republicans or people who just happened to be guilty of living in a Catholic area: most IRA volunteers evaded capture. On the first day of internment 9 Catholic civilians were killed by the troops. The raids, the house searches and the intimidation helped to destroy any lingering faith in British democracy. A group of Belfast women immediately launched a rent and rates strike, and by the end of the year more than 23,000 families were refusing to pay their bills to the state. Barricades went up all over nationalist areas, and in the 'no-go areas' of West Belfast and Derry working class communities virtually ran themselves.

The war continued. On 30th January 1972 15,000 people marched through Derry in a demonstration against internment. Without warning, soldiers of the Parachute Regiment opened fire on the crowd. When the shooting stopped, 13 unarmed civilians were dead, gunned down in cold blood. The incident became known as Bloody Sunday, and it signified the absolute end of 'normal' politics in the 6 Counties. It was an attempt to murder a mass movement, to terrorise working class Catholics off the

streets. Around the world there were immediate demonstrations against this legalised brutality. In the 26 Counties the impact was massive. An enormous strike wave started, sparked off by workers acting without union consent. In Dublin an angry crowd of 30,000 marched to the British Embassy and burnt it down.

The British ruling class for the first time feared that repression on the scale of Bloody Sunday might spread the struggle southwards. That would be disastrous for British economic and strategic interests. So in March 1972 they abolished Stormont, the 6 County Parliament, and imposed direct rule from London. From now on, Whitehall would run the RUC and UDR, oversee the courts and take complete control of the North's economy. The idea was that the British state would once more be cast in the role of the defender of the besieged Catholic population. It backfired. For 50 years, Stormont had tried to give the Orange State a democratic appearance. Now all pretence had gone: military occupation was the name of the game.



● A march in Newry under the shadow of the guns of the state.

But Whitehall realised that it couldn't rely on repression alone. In July 1972 'Operation Motorman' had smashed down the barricades in the ghettos of West Belfast and Derry: the destruction of the 'no-go' zones had been the biggest military operation so far. But it hadn't destroyed the resistance. The British government tried to encourage middle class Cath-



olics to come forward and collaborate in isolating the 'extremists'. The idea was to create a middle-ground of moderate opinion and let 'normal' politics re-appear. This strategy culminated in the power-sharing assembly which brought together the major Unionist parties and the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), the constitutional nationalist party. But the plan was doomed to failure from the start. It was an attempt to put a non-sectarian government in charge of a state that was founded on sectarianism. For power-sharing to work, it would have meant dismantling the Orange State. Hardline Loyalists realised this, and in May 1974 they organised a general strike of Loyalist workers, under the banner of the Ulster Workers Council. When the Labour Government ordered British troops to move into the power stations and break the strike, the Army refused. The middle-ground collapsed. Yet again, the nature of state power was clearly demonstrated: if this had been a republican strike, they would have all been shot. As it was a Loyalist strike the Army virtually joined the picket lines.



● Army round-up in Derry

From now on, there was no solution. The only hope for the British state was to contain the Provos in the Catholic ghettos. Violence was accepted as inevitable in this undeclared war, but it was to be kept to "an acceptable level" by isolating the republican paramilitaries. By this stage the Provisional IRA had been joined by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), a split-off from the Official IRA who had now given up the ghost.

Three new long-term policies were started by the British state. The first, Ulsterisation, involved replacing British troops, wherever possible, with the RUC. This went hand-in-hand with the second policy, normalisation. It wasn't 'normal' to have British troops patrolling Irish streets. But armed RUC policemen were OK. Meanwhile, the state paid people to paint over Republican murals and replace them with portraits of pop stars. The third policy was criminalisation. Now that the Army had taken a back-seat, it was possible to portray the war as a fight between criminals and an impartial police force. From now on, the IRA were to be described as "god-fathers of crime", "an Irish mafia", etc.

To make 'law and order' work, the Labour government had to introduce a whole new series of special laws that have lasted to this day. Diplock courts sit with no jury to try political prisoners. They have a 90-95% conviction rate. It quickly became known as the conveyor belt system of justice: a nationalist is arrested and is held for up to a week; during this time they are 'interrogated' (i.e. beaten and tortured); and then on the strength of a 'confession' alone, they are sentenced by a single Loyalist judge.

Since the British state claimed there was no war, it was logical to withdraw political status for political prisoners. After all, convicted republicans were simply gangsters and should be treated like any other criminals. In January 1976 the republican movement declared that they would not accept the change in their status. They would carry on regarding the republican inmates as prisoners-of-war. In September of that year, Kieran Nugent became the first republican to be denied 'special category' status. He retaliated by refusing to wear a prison uniform. The blanket protest had begun. By Spring 1978 there were 300 prisoners, men and women, 'on the blanket'. They escalated their protest by refusing to wash their cells. The 'dirty protest' became the symbol of a defiant and continuing resistance to British repression. Support for the prisoners grew.





In 1980 a hunger strike began in the prisons in support of the republican demand for political status. It was called off at the end of the year in the mistaken belief that the British state was willing to negotiate. In March 1981 it began again, when Bobby Sands in Long Kesh refused to take food. The struggle inside the prison revitalised the republican movement and a new generation of young working class Catholics came to the fore. On 9 April Bobby Sands became the Honourable Robert Sands, MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone. Two more republican prisoners were elected to the Dail, the 26 county Parliament, a few months later. The policy of criminalisation was in tatters, as it became more and more obvious that thousands of working class Catholics saw the Hunger Strikers as prisoners of war, not criminals.

When Bobby Sands died on 5 May 1981 there was immediate rioting in West Belfast as thousands of republicans took to the streets. Sands' coffin was followed by some 100,000 people. Over the next five months, nine more hunger strikers died. Each death was followed by more riots, more demonstrations and more anger. The republican working class had once again discovered its collective power.

The sterility of the 1970s was gone. Republicanism was once again a mass working class movement. And the British state was back to square one, faced with a population that refused to lie down. Predictably, the gloves came off, and the state declared it was no longer interested in containing the struggle. Nothing short of the elimination of republicanism would do. The result was the 'shoot-to-kill' policy that operated between 1982 and 1985. This time, the state appeared to have learnt its lessons. Unlike internment and Bloody Sunday, this sort of repression was meant to be highly selective, targeting only known republicans. Of course, being a republican didn't necessarily mean being in the IRA or INLA, but the SAS weren't interested in such subtleties. Some 40 republicans were assassinated, no questions asked.

Once again, though, this level of repression brought the same old problems for the British state: the new wave of terror united working class Catholic communities more than ever. The response was the Anglo-Irish Agreement, signed by both the Dublin and Westminster governments in November 1985. Politicians claimed it offered a new deal to nationalists in the North. Most Loyalists were violently hostile to the Agreement, believing it gave the Dublin government a say in the running of the 6 Counties. The reality was quite different. Dublin politely asked that three judges, instead of one, should sit in the no-jury Diplock courts. This mild suggestion was rejected out of hand. In fact, the centre of the Agreement was not reforms but a tightening of repression. Dublin and Westminster now collaborate openly on border security, and republicans are freely extradited from the South.

The hope behind the Agreement was that working class republicans, particularly those around the IRA, could be isolated. But the Agreement did nothing to challenge the repression, sectarianism and poverty that

working class Catholics face in the 6 Counties. The only thing that changed was that the SDLP, prime backers of the Agreement, lost even more credibility in the eyes of the republican community.

## Soldiers speak

*The British soldier is the cutting edge of the British state in the 6 Counties. So it is quite interesting to hear the experiences of a few who have served there:*

"A week after we got to Belfast it was the anniversary of internment. On my first patrol, walking around the Lower Falls, getting a feel for the atmosphere, I gave a little boy, four or five years old, a wink. he said: 'Do you want your fucking bollocks cut off and sewn up?' I was appalled..."

*Sergeant, 1st Royal Green Jackets*

"On my last tour in 1985, we were driving out of Londonderry and there was a small child, couldn't have been more than five or six, at the side of the road. I saw him look up at us, and a great panic overtook him. There was a large log on the pavement literally almost as big as he was, and I've never seen so much desperation to get it picked up to throw at us. I was destroyed. I thought 'why am I here?'"

*Sergeant, Women's Royal Army Corps Provost*

*The final word should be left to a Sergeant in the Royal Military Police who grew up in Belfast, describing his pre-Army days:*

"We never went around with the intention of fighting soldiers or policemen because, from the Protestant viewpoint, the soldiers and policemen were always on our side."





Recently the British state has reverted to an even more extreme form of Ulsterisation: Loyalist murder gangs like the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Freedom Fighters are now operating a new shoot-to-kill policy on behalf of the Army. As ever, the monkeys are happy to do the dirty work for the organ-grinders. That's not to say that the British state minds getting its hands dirty. In 1988, three unarmed republicans (Mairéad Farrell, Dan McCann and Sean Savage) were assassinated in Gibraltar by the SAS. It was obvious that a decision had been taken to 'eliminate' them, and so intimidate the republican movement. At the same time, the British state still denies that it's fighting a war in Ireland. In fact, Ireland is so 'peaceful' that the British state decided to censor Sinn Fein last year (so much for 'freedom of speech!'). All of this is unlikely to have any effect.

In 1979, a secret document British Army document summed the situation up:

**"The Provisional IRA is essentially a working class organisation based in the ghetto areas of the cities and the poorer rural areas... Our evidence of the calibre of the rank-and-file terrorists does not support the view that they are mindless hooligans... The movement will retain popular support... The campaign is likely to continue while the British remain in Ireland."**

Ten years on, that analysis is still correct.

# 7.

## The republican movement

The last 800 years of history show that real change in Ireland will not come about without first removing the British state. This is not a new idea. It's as old as the British occupation of Ireland itself. Today's republican movement is a direct descendant of those last 800 years of struggle. But for the first time in recent history, it is a movement deeply embedded in a section of the Irish working class. Republicanism today is not a matter for armchair intellectuals or middle class politicians: it is a working class movement. Because of this simple fact, it has revolutionary potential. So it's not surprising that the British state has persistently tried to define republicanism as 'the IRA'. The state will always try to pretend that a mass movement is really just the actions of a few hundred men and women. But it is a trap that many so-called 'revolutionaries' have also fallen into.

Nevertheless, the IRA is usually described as 'the cutting edge' of the republican struggle. It is obvious why. For one thing, the IRA is the one real defence against attacks on working class communities in nationalist areas. The IRA only re-emerged in the summer of 1970 in response to continued Loyalist invasions of West Belfast's Catholic ghettos. Twenty years later, sectarian attacks are still a real threat: over 700 Catholics have been assassinated by Loyalist murder gangs since the recent 'troubles' began. But the IRA also plays an offensive role. Its actions are a constant reminder that there is a war going on just a few miles away. IRA attacks on British troops, and on the locally recruited RUC and UDR,



weaken morale and hamper state military operations. In South Armagh, for example, the only way the Army dares travel is by helicopter. In the long run, IRA operations are part of a strategy aimed at destabilising the 6 Counties and making them ungovernable.

The most striking thing about the IRA is its resilience. It has survived 20 years of almost total state repression. Even its critics admit that it is the most discriminating and effective guerilla army operating anywhere in the world. And that is simply because it is a part of the working class communities from which it operates. As one republican said, "IRA members... are Mrs Smith's daughter or young O'Connor down the street. The child you brought to school, or you went to their wedding. It's not Staff Officer Paddy Maguire, it's Mrs Maguire's boy." Alongside this, the IRA elects its own leadership, and recruits men and women on an equal basis. In fact, as a republican woman pointed out, the idea of 'IRA Volunteers' is almost meaningless in an armed movement that is based in a working class community:

"Women have taken part on an equal footing with men in the armed resistance, but the centre of resistance in Belfast, and indeed in Northern Ireland, is family resistance. The revolutionary unit in fact is basically the family, either the nuclear family or the extended family. People operate from their houses, they are supported by their wives, mothers, uncles and children... To say that men rather than women take part is an absolute nonsense."

## The perfect crime

*The IRA and the republican working class are for the most part indivisible. The first is part of the second. If you still doubt it, here's the proof: a perfect crime where the only loser was the Council. It's just a shame that we have to rely on a British squaddie for this account:*

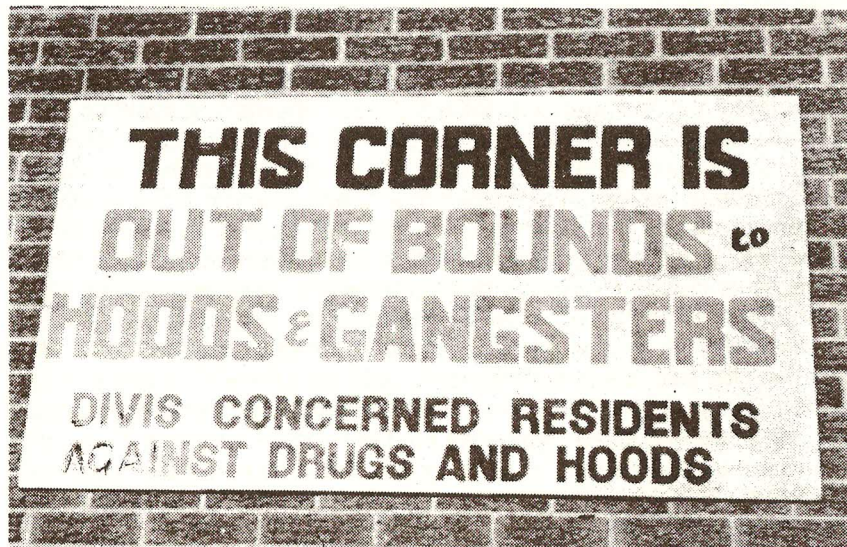
"After internment the Catholics went on rent strike, and there was talk of shutting off the water and the electricity if they didn't pay up. So what did Paddy do? He went round to the local betting shop, held up the cashier, raked in a few thousand quid, then went round to the first house in the street and asked 'how much do you owe?' 'Forty seven pounds and twenty pence.' 'Here's the money.' And he went down the whole street with the cash and paid them out. The rent man came, knocked at the first door: 'Mrs Murphy, you owe....' She paid it all, the book was signed, and so on down the row. The rent man got to the last house, well pleased he'd got the money off all the street - and Paddy was standing there on the corner: 'Hands up!' Took all the money off the rent man, gave it back to the bookie, and that was it. You had to admire that: brilliant."

For some people, the IRA's military campaign is all too much: they write the IRA off as 'a bunch of murdering bastards'. But it's clear that by any standards, the Provos have fought a relatively 'clean' war. There's no doubt that if the IRA wanted to kill hundreds of civilians, it could do so tomorrow. But, as the IRA themselves said after an operation went wrong in 1988, "we have nothing to gain by the deaths of two civilians, and in fact have much to lose in terms of support, and in terms of the propaganda use which the British government will make out of this incident." Instead, IRA Volunteers aim their activities at 'legitimate targets': those who are actively involved in putting down a rebellious population. Since 1969, nearly 700 members of the 'security forces' (the RUC, the UDR and the British Army) have been killed by the IRA. Of course it's not nice. War never is. It's sad to see working class lads being blown to pieces in another country, fighting a war they don't understand on behalf of a system that offers them nothing. But to lay the blame for all of this at the door of the IRA makes no sense at all. It makes much more sense to ask who started the war, who put the boot in first? The answer is always the same: the British state and its agents.

Of course, there's no denying that the IRA do make mistakes. As it steps up activity against the British state, the chances of another Enniskillen multiply. 'Accidents of war', however accidental, are no less tragic for that. But to go on to argue that that the IRA should therefore declare a ceasefire is asking working class Catholics to commit collective suicide. The experience of the 1960s is crystal-clear: Catholic ghettos can expect nothing from the British state in the way of protection from sectarian attacks. When they're not organising the attacks themselves, the British state and its local puppets are only too happy to encourage them.

But there are limitations to the IRA's campaign. The armed struggle can be a double edged weapon. In the 6 Counties, weapons are relatively easy to come by. As a result personal and political differences are often settled with a bullet: in 1987 the Irish Republican Socialist Party (the unofficial political wing of INLA) was torn apart by just this sort of murderous feud. More importantly, there is the real possibility that the IRA will be called upon to 'police' the Catholic ghettos of the North. This happened briefly in 1975 during the official IRA ceasefire - with disastrous results. But those who say it is happening again with IRA punishment beatings and shootings are wrong, for the moment at least. Anti-social crimes like rape, burglary and joy-riding on poor council estates are never easy to deal with. In many areas 'hoods' are a real problem: they are well-organised gangs of working class kids who are quite happy to rip off other working class people. Faced with this problem, some armchair critics argue that the community should police itself rather than looking to the IRA. But they have conveniently forgotten that IRA Volunteers too are part of that community. And if the IRA did refuse to take action against rapists or smack dealers, those same critics would be the first to denounce them.





● Local activity against anti-social crime.

More seriously, all the guns and bombs in the world will not bring real freedom, unless they are connected to a mass working class movement. A purely military struggle cannot win on its own. But the IRA are the first to admit this. The most important feature of the 1980s has been the attempt by the republican movement to break out of the dead-end of militarism. The change in Sinn Fein is just the most public part of this strategy. Fifteen years ago, Sinn Fein was little more than an auxiliary arm of the IRA. Today it is an equal partner. The new strategy is reflected in the republican slogan of "the Armalite and the ballot box." At its 1989 Ard Fheis (annual conference) Sinn Fein made it clear that the only way forward is "an all-Ireland anti-imperialist mass movement." The republican movement knows that it can't reform the Orange State, only destroy it. And now it accepts that real change cannot just happen within the 6 Counties. But what are its chances of success. And what does 'success' mean?

The dangers of a purely nationalist struggle are obvious. The experience of the 26 Counties is a classic example. The struggle for real liberation was suppressed in the 1920s by Irish bosses. They were happy to have won the right to manage their own capitalism. Since then, the so-called 'Free State' has shown itself to be a worthy successor to British imperialism. For most of its history it has been governed by the Fianna Fail party. Fianna Fail originated in the republican wing of Sinn Fein that opposed the 1921 Treaty. But you'd never tell by looking at the country it has governed. In social terms the 26 county state is probably the most backward area in the whole of Europe: the dead hand of Catholicism has

banned abortion, divorce and contraception. In economic terms, too, the South is a disaster area. Unemployment runs at over 20%, and the state owes nearly £10 billion to foreign money-lenders. To remedy this, the country has now been opened up to multinationals looking to make a quick buck with no questions asked.

And of course, the 26 Counties has proved to be no less hostile to republicanism than the Loyalist state in the North. Both the IRA and INLA are proscribed organisations. The notorious Section 31 of the Broadcasting Authority Act banned 'subversives' (i.e. republicans) from appearing on the airwaves long before the British state gagged Sinn Fein. The security forces in the South are on constant alert against any dangerous organisations: interestingly, the 26 counties state is technically neutral, and so the Free State Army only exists to police internal dissent. Recently, two prominent Sinn Fein members were each jailed for 5 years for alleged IRA membership: one had made a republican speech, the other owned a republican poster. Repression is a 32 county phenomenon.

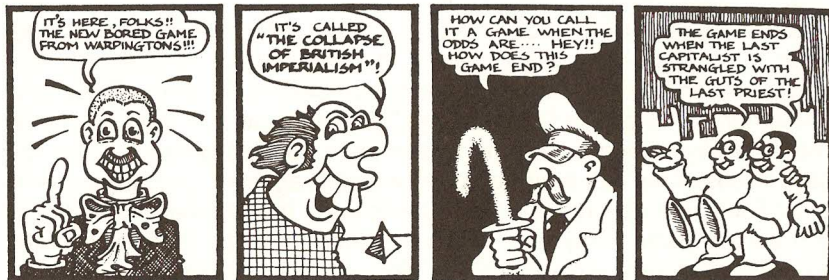
Obviously, if Sinn Fein wants a 32 county Ireland to look like this, it will find little support among working class Catholics in the North. Why swap one repressive regime for another? At the same time, 70% of new investment in the South comes from US multinationals: a slogan of "Brits Out!" will not cut much ice with workers ruled from Washington rather than Whitehall.

Nationalism will always be a dead-end. Because the idea of 'national unity' papers over deep social divisions. The interests of Irish bosses and Irish workers are not the same. Real freedom will only come about by asking which class will wield power in a united Ireland. In 1981 during the Hunger Strike, there were mass demonstrations and strikes all over Ireland. Yet 'An Phoblacht/Republican News' (the newspaper of the republican movement) could only say this: "Britain can only be beaten when the Free State premier, the SDLP leader and the Catholic hierarchy are forced to apply their muscle instead of, as at present, playing at it." This is the tired old call to people to look to 'leaders' to solve their basic problems. And it's symbolic of a deep lack of faith in the ability of the working class to organise and struggle by itself. The experience south of the border shows that without working class self-organisation genuine liberation is not possible. This lack of faith was demonstrated by Gerry Adams who declared a couple of years ago: "This is a special message for young people - no hi-jackings, no joyridings, no stone throwing at the Brits. If you want to do these things, there are organisations to do this for you." Again, in 1984, Sinn Fein recommended that people vote for Fianna Fail and Charles Haughey in the 26 county general election. Now that Haughey has started extraditing republicans to the North, that recommendation looks like a very bad joke.

To its credit, Sinn Fein now recognises that Fianna Fail is no more republican than Fine Gael, and that both are rotten to the core. As part of its new strategy, Sinn Fein now organises as an independent political



party south of the border. This move towards electoral politics started back in 1981 with the election of Bobby Sands. It received a bigger boost in 1983 when Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein's President, became MP for West Belfast.



As a rule, going to the ballot box anywhere is a waste of time, if not downright counter-productive. But there are subtle differences between electoral politics here and in the 6 Counties. For one thing, standing as a Sinn Fein candidate often means signing your own death warrant. It's hard to accuse such people of 'careerism' unless you believe they actually want to die. Secondly, even if Sinn Fein candidates do get elected, and even if they did get a majority, the hands of local councils in the 6 Counties are tied like nowhere else. Again, trite slogans like 'power-mongering' don't hold much water.

Having said that, Sinn Fein is being increasingly drawn into the corrupt world of establishment politics. Its support in council elections seems to have peaked, and many wonder which way the organisation should go. At its 1986 Ard Fheis, Sinn Fein delegates voted to end their policy of 'abstentionism'. Ever since the birth of the Free State, Sinn Fein had refused to recognise it or its Parliament. Now, after much debate, Sinn Fein members will take their seats in the Dail if elected. Of course, older die-hard republicans were bitterly opposed to the idea, seeing it as a rejection of everything they had fought for. The Sinn Fein leadership appeased them by ditching the organisation's commitment to abortion rights for women. Years of hard work by Northern working class women were thrown overboard in minutes. Votes had come to mean more than principles. In the same way, in the recent 26 Counties referendum on abortion, Sinn Fein sat on the fence,

Similarly, the Sinn Fein leadership has felt hampered by the lack of real power wielded in local councils. But what power could they wield within the existing capitalist structure anyway? (A point Sinn Fein has not addressed because it threatens its own existence as a semi-constitutional party). At the end of 1988 it entered into negotiations with the SDLP. Gerry Adams defended this decision by saying that Sinn Fein would talk with anyone sincerely interested in justice and peace. The reality is quite different. For one thing, the SDLP has a 20 year record of slavish co-

operation with the British state: why does Gerry Adams expect them to change the habits of a lifetime? More seriously, while Sinn Fein leaders were sitting down with the middle class hacks of the SDLP, they were trying to extinguish any left-wing voices of dissent. In particular, Sinn Fein appears to have made a decision to crush the Irish Republican Socialist Party. In October 1988, Sinn Fein withdrew from the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration March because they did not want to appear on the same platform as the IRSP. The IRSP are a small communist party: their politics, while republican, are mostly Marxist-Leninist dogma. But it's hypocritical, to put it mildly, for the Sinn Fein leadership to try and strangle the IRSP, and at the same time have tea and biscuits with the anti-republican, bourgeois SDLP.

At their 1987 Ard Fheis, Sinn Fein rejected a motion calling for a rank-and-file movement of trades unionists and the unemployed to fight back against attacks on workers. It appears that Sinn Fein are frightened by the thought of a militant workers' movement. Is this connected to Sinn Fein's plans for a new democracy unveiled in 1989? This campaign was launched by, among others, Phil Flynn. Flynn is a trade union bureaucrat in the 26 Counties. Under Haughey's government, he was responsible for drawing up "The National Programme for Economic Recovery". This was an agreement between Fianna Fail and the trade unions: Fianna Fail promised to increase employment if wage rises were kept below 3%. But, like the Labour government's Social Contract which operated in Britain in the late 1970s, it was a thinly veiled attack on workers' living standards.



● Derry residents waiting for the next British Army patrol.



In fact Sinn Fein's thinking is getting closer to the old 'stages' theory that was popular among republican intellectuals in the 1960s: national liberation comes first, and then we'll think about socialism. That theory was wrong then, and it's wrong now. It has more to do with creeping reformism than any meaningful change.

Of course these changes in the republican movement, and especially within Sinn Fein, are not finished yet. They are part of a process that has been going on since the explosion of 1969 put republicanism back on the map. And the recent shifts in direction can still be overturned. For one thing, there will always be a division between the Sinn Fein rank-and-file and the leadership. For another, the republican movement itself is far wider than any one organisation. It runs from the actions of an IRA Active Service Unit to a women's centre on the Falls Road, from the political work of someone like Gerry Adams to a community-run creche and drop-in centre in the Divis Flats. It is as stupid to equate republicanism with Sinn Fein as it is to equate it with the IRA. It is a classic leftist trap: mythologise the organisation, and ignore working class self-activity.

It's no surprise then that Sinn Fein is not a revolutionary party. After all, a 'revolutionary party' is a contradiction in terms. As for the future, no-one can predict what it holds for Sinn Fein. Our guess is that the recent censorship will make sod-all difference, and that, like the IRA, Sinn Fein will live to fight imperialism for as long as it exists in Ireland. But it may be that in 20 years time, Sinn Fein is viewed in the same way as the Labour Party is in Britain: at best irrelevant, at worst an obstacle. Sinn Fein may still turn out to be just another state-in-waiting: that is always a risk you run with separate political organisations. And although it has distanced itself from the disastrous 1975 ceasefire, history has a strange way of repeating itself. For the moment, Sinn Fein talks of socialism and a united Ireland in the same breath. There's nothing wrong with that. But if Sinn Fein aims to be, not part of a social revolution, but a socialist government, with workers obediently following their leaders, then we can only repeat James Connolly's advice on the eve of the 1916 Rising:

**"In the event of victory, hold on to your rifles, as those with whom we're fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are fighting for economic as well as political liberty."**

# 8.

## Breaking the links

The history of Ireland is one of imperialist occupation by the British state. That occupation must be ended. There's no question about that. But it's no good fighting for British withdrawal out of 'sympathy' for the Irish. Or trying to patronise Ireland in the same way liberals patronise the Third World. In fact, getting the troops out isn't a moral issue at all. It's not a question of 'being nice' to a suffering people, or trying to turn Ireland into another Nicaragua. If we look at why the British state is in Ireland, then it becomes clear that fighting for immediate British withdrawal from Ireland is in our interests too.

In the past, the driving force behind British rule in Ireland was obvious: profit. The conquest of Ireland was initially a money-grabbing exercise. Nothing unusual about that. But today it's a different story. It's reckoned that the war in the 6 Counties is costing the British state somewhere between £15 and £40 million every week. It's not simply a matter of funding repression. The entire economy of the North-East is completely dependent on the British Treasury. Harland and Wolff, the giant Belfast shipyard, is a classic case: jobs there have been subsidised over the last few years to the tune of about £8,000 per job per year. In terms of net profit, the North of Ireland is a dead loss.

Of course, after World War Two, Ireland became more and more important for defence reasons. The 26 Counties are technically neutral, and the British state was afraid that a united Ireland would opt out of NATO. The British ruling class has been terrified by the same sort of thing for the



past 400 years. As the 'Daily Telegraph' said back in 1976: "British security is hardly compatible with the existence of a Cuba a few miles from her Western shores." But recently the American government has made it clear that US military and economic interests would be better served by a united Ireland firmly under the control of American multinationals. In the long term, if the American state played its cards right, a united neo-colonial Ireland would actually be a safer bet. So the defence argument is a red herring.

So why does the British state stay? The reason is basic, and runs to the heart of the British state itself. The state stays because it can do nothing else. There are no middle ground respectable figures who can be handed the reins of power, as happened in the 26 Counties and other ex-colonies like India. If it could find stable local puppets, the British ruling class would probably give them power like a shot. Despite the rhetoric, they don't really care too much whether Ireland is united or not. The point is that it stays in loyal hands. What scares them witless is the thought of an uncontrollable united Ireland.

But every attempt by the British state to create a middle ground has failed. Five different governments have tried to reform the Orange State and sow the seeds for a new leadership: all have failed. The truth is that there can be no middle ground in a war.

For once in his rotten life, Enoch Powell was right when he said that "Ulster is Britain's test of its own will to be a nation." Because there is no middle ground, the 6 Counties have become a test of the ruling class' ability to rule. As it stands, the British state can no more withdraw from the North of Ireland than it can from the North of England. Such a withdrawal would be a major defeat for the ruling class. It would give the green light to working class people in this country. It could end up destroying the whole structure of power, here and everywhere. It's an exaggeration to say that the British state stands or falls in Ireland. But there's a lot of truth in it. Because the issue in Ireland is state power.

Over the last 20 years, the British state has been forced to introduce more and more repressive measures in order to contain and suppress resistance to British rule. From internment to the non-jury Diplock courts; from the supergrass system to shoot-to-kill; from the banning of Sinn Fein to the latest round of Loyalist assassinations. As one IRA Volunteer commented: "They've had to take the mask off because there's been opposition to them." It's a lesson that the miners, printworkers, inner-city black communities and countless others have learnt. Once people confront the state, the gloves come off, and the state stands naked for what it is: an

armed force that exists only to protect the ruling class and their profits. In the 6 Counties, this process is advanced like nowhere else in Western Europe. The liberal facade of 'democracy', 'justice' and 'free speech' has been ripped away. And with them go any illusions about reform. As the graffiti in West Belfast says: "Parliament is the political wing of the British Army." In the North of Ireland, the reality of state power is all too obvious: high unemployment, appalling housing conditions, poverty, low wages, troops on the streets, and vicious, unpredictable powers.

## Torture: the reality of state power

*(From an account by an IRA Volunteer)*

"And you stand with your legs apart, there's three of them round you, behind you, and they're swinging their punches in, you're throwing up and they're putting you back up again and this fucking Branch man just puts a big boot right between my legs, crushes my balls. I collapse in a heap. And I pass out and they wake me up and they put me up against the wall and I get asked another question and I don't answer it, and they do the same again, they done it three times. And they drag me out and they throw me back in the main interrogation room and they were all doing press ups at the time and I was fucking...listen, I was terrified, I would have done fucking anything for anyone, except talk to them. I was genuinely terrified."

Our position is clear. We begin by taking sides with those fighting back against oppression. This is not a sentimental approach. It is hard-headed and practical: it is in our interests too. For one thing, we share a common enemy with those fighting against British rule. More practically, staying in Ireland has had useful spin-offs for the British state. The 6 Counties are a real-life laboratory for social control. We have already felt some of the lessons here in this country; in the miners' and printworkers' strikes, in the riots of 1981 and 1985. Policing tactics here come directly from the experience of the 6 Counties. Every superintendent in Britain has to do a tour of duty with the RUC. New techniques for social control, like plastic bullets and CS gas, are first tried and tested in the ghettos of the North of Ireland. Britain's own political police, the Special Branch, were originally created to fight the growth of revolutionary republicanism. And the state uses the war in Ireland to establish legal precedents in this country: the ending of a defendant's right to silence, the abolition of juries, the censorship of Sinn Fein. It's obvious that a nation that oppresses another does forge its own chains.



If the state is busy learning its lessons, there's plenty for us to learn too. From the first plantation of Protestant settlers to the present day, the British state has always tried to divide and rule. Religious differences were deliberately planted, nurtured and developed to keep the bosses firmly in control. Without these artificial divisions in Ireland, partition would have never happened, and the British state would have been forced out years ago. Racism in Britain works in exactly the same way. It's not a 'natural' part of working class life. People with the same economic interests are set against each other by those they have nothing in common with. There are other lessons to be learnt. How the rebellion of 1969 was betrayed by the clean-shirted brigade who crawled out once the fighting was over. How radical words quickly became conservative politics. How state power has more to do with plastic bullets than Parliament. And how meaningful change only ever comes from below.

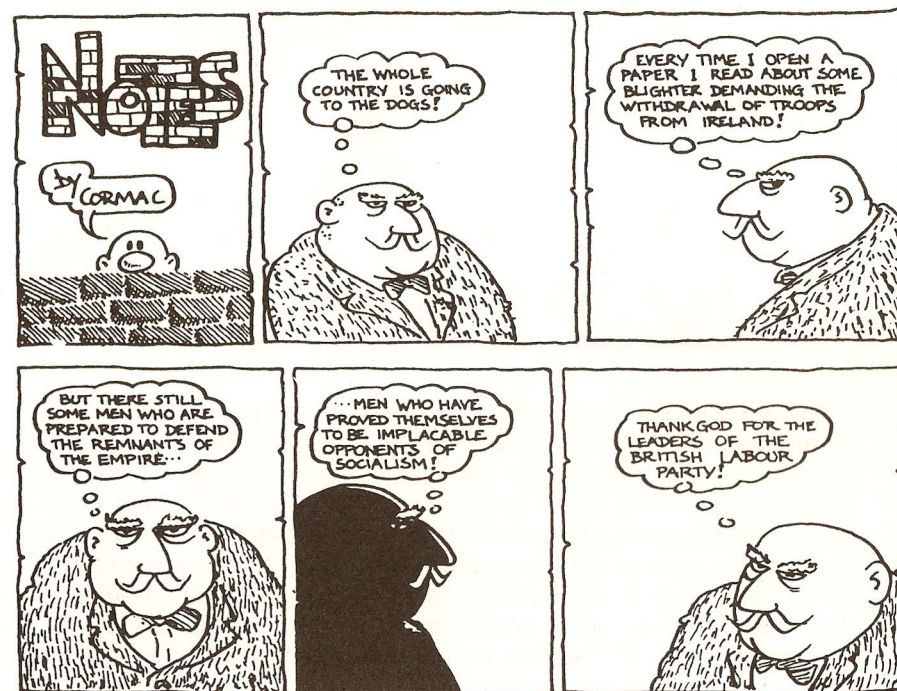


● Belfast - the writing on the wall.

Of course, some have ignored or distorted the reality of the 6 Counties because they are too scared to learn the lessons. Not surprisingly, the war in Ireland has revealed the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy in their true colours. At all times, they have upheld the right of the British state to occupy Ireland. The Army was sent in on the orders of a Labour government, a government that had also presided over the upsurge in Loyalist attacks in the mid-1960s. It was the Labour Party that introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in 1974, the most powerful law the British state has at its disposal. And when the PTA was recently made permanent, the Labour Party refused to oppose it. Again, it was a Labour government that developed the policy of criminalisation of political prisoners in 1976. And last year, Neil Kinnock showed the depth of

## The Labour Party and Ireland

- 1969: Wilson's government sends in the British Army
- 1974: Labour government introduces the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act
- 1976: Labour withdraws special category status for political prisoners, and opens the H-Blocks
- 1978: Labour government gives more seats to the Loyalists to keep itself in power
- 1981: Labour's Northern Ireland spokesman tells a dying Bobby Sands that Labour supports the Tory government's position
- 1984: Neil Kinnock backs the 'shoot-to-kill' policy and urges that "every force" be used against republicans
- 1985: Labour welcomes the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a step towards increased "security"
- 1988: Labour refuses to oppose the new PTA. Kinnock denounces the IRA as a "deranged gang of terrorists"





Labour's understanding when he said "the IRA are a deranged gang of terrorists seeking to indulge their blood-lust." Labour's record on Ireland shows that, as in every other walk of life, it is ever obedient to the needs of the British ruling class: Her Majesty's Very Loyal Opposition.

Some elements on the left of the Labour Party do argue for withdrawal. These include the group of intellectuals based around the Communist Party who like to imagine that they are some sort of radical think-tank for the labour movement. But their demand for withdrawal is half-baked. Bob Rowthorn, for instance, reckons that "Britain should offer to deploy her economic resources to help shore up the new state (a united Ireland)". Some people never learn from history. Even if it was willing, the British state could not act in a 'beneficial' way - unless it was in its own interests.

It is much the same with the recent 'Time To Go' initiative set up by left Labour MPs and assorted academics. They boast that "Time To Go does not pick sides in the conflict in Northern Ireland." Not surprisingly, they go on to argue that Britain has some sort of 'responsibility' to Ireland. This is not politics at all, but moralism. Time To Go seem to really believe that the British state can do something progressive in Ireland. Like fools, they think it is possible to talk sweet reason with the ruling class, and persuade them to give up power without a fight.



There are others on the left who can see this sort of liberal mish-mash for the crap that it is. Groups like the Labour Committee on Ireland (LCI) seem to be moving in the right direction, but it is a false impression. However 'republican' they might sound, the LCI still sees the Labour Party as the vehicle for change in Ireland. They believe that the Party which sent the troops in and which has supported keeping them there ever since, can somehow be swung round to an alternative policy. At the end of the day, this illusion in Labour undermines anything else that the LCI might do: banging your head against a brick wall would actually be more effective.

The Labour Party has promised that it will not use Ireland as "a political football": it totally refuses to challenge British state strategy. But plenty of left-wing parties are happy to use Ireland in this way. They each claim that their party line on Ireland is different from everyone else's; in reality of course, they're all as sectarian and opportunist as each other. The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) are simply the worst of a very bad bunch. On paper, their line on Ireland is quite attractive. In reality it's a different story. Like all left groups, they are obsessed by The Organisation and ignore the working class. Their talk is of unconditional, uncompromising support, even if "the IRA was made up of Catholic priests and nuns" (September 1988). This is dangerous and mistaken: it means that 'fighting imperialism' is enough without radical politics. The RCP even have their own separate organisation, the Irish Freedom Movement (IFM). But the IFM is much more concerned with the RCP than with building a genuine Irish solidarity movement. Like all Leninists, they believe that revolution can only come through the Party: as a result, they are more interested in recruitment to the Party than in practical struggles in the here and now.

There are other left-wing groups who fall midway between the Labour Party and the tiny sects. They really ought to know better, if only because the people they worship, like Marx, made a point of supporting Irish freedom. The Militant group, who operate inside the Labour Party, are a prime example. Their guru, Leon Trotsky, said that "the British socialist who fails to support the uprisings in Egypt, Ireland and India deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet." By that reckoning, Militant will be the first up against the wall. They argue that the "armed struggle of a few Republican terrorists has achieved nothing positive". They go on to lump the IRA together with the UVF, and condemn both as "sectarian paramilitaries". Worse still, they claim that the IRA has driven Protestant workers into the arms of Unionists, the Orange Order and the Loyalist paramilitary groups.

Militant's arguments would be laughable if they weren't repeated so regularly, by a whole variety of different groups. Time and time again, people argue that Protestant and Catholic workers will have to unite before anything can be achieved. It's a classic case of the so-called 'left' putting the cart before the horse. For instance, Loyalist violence existed long before the Provisional IRA was formed, let alone fired a shot. Likewise, the Orange State was founded on the idea of violence and repression. In the fight between the IRA and the security forces or Loyalist gangs, there is no 'neutral' position. Militant blame state repression and sectarian violence on those who are on the receiving end of it. In this, they openly side with the British state. It's not surprising that Militant supported the troops being sent in 20 years ago.



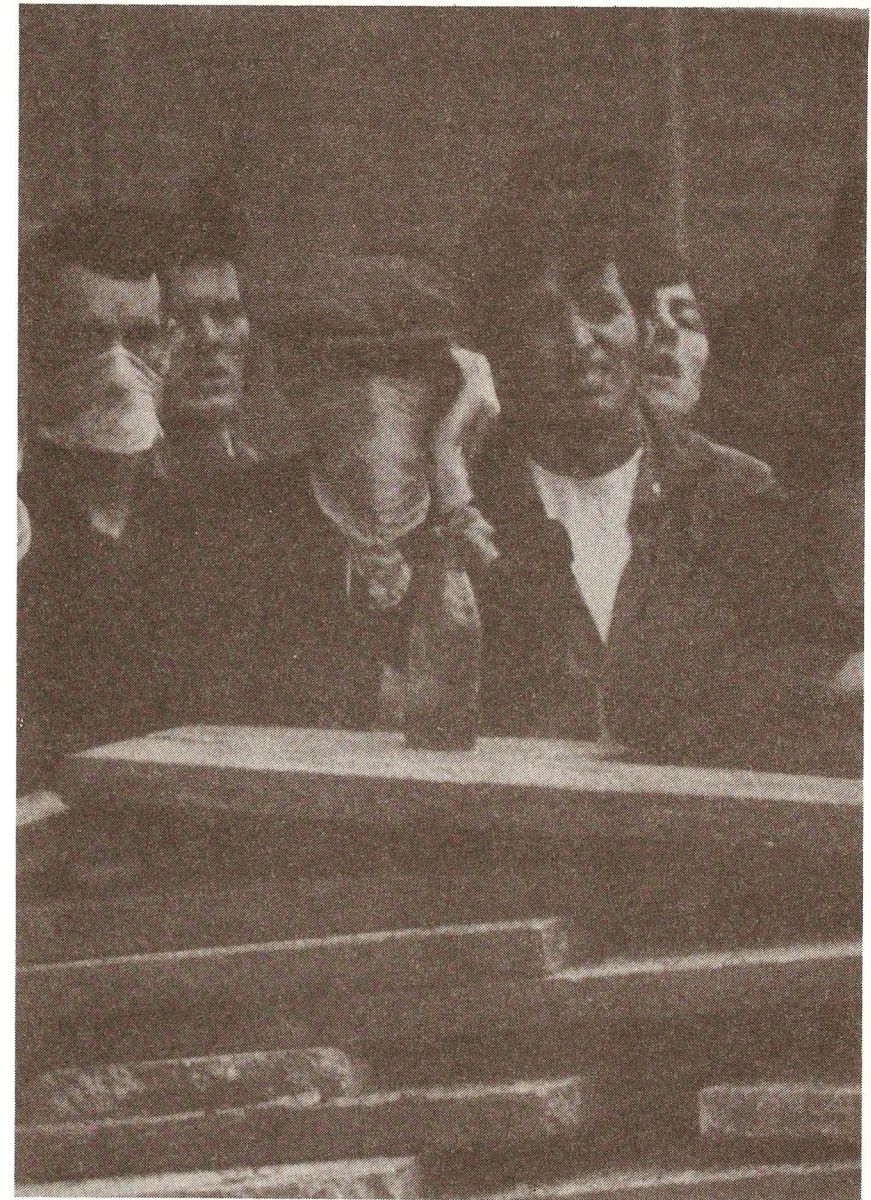
Again it is common to accuse the republican movement of being sectarian and being responsible for the deep divisions between Irish workers. This is standing reality on its head. The republican movement on the whole is not sectarian in the slightest. Republicans know that their enemy is the British state, not the Protestant religion. Not only that, but the republican movement is not a 'Catholic' movement, despite being mainly made up of working class Catholics. Over recent years, republicans have fought running battles with the Catholic Church who are determined to strangle real resistance to British rule. No-one could say the same for Loyalism: by definition, Loyalists are completely tied to Unionist bosses and the various Protestant churches that back them.

More importantly, the idea of winning over Loyalist workers from Loyalism is a non-starter at the moment. Militant's call for 'workers' unity' is echoed by other groups like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The SWP aren't so stupid as to demand an all-Ireland Labour Party as Militant do. But their politics are no less rotten. Over the years, their party line has changed so many times that even Party faithfuls are not sure of the 'correct' attitude towards the IRA: back in 1969, 'Socialist Worker' even agreed with the Army being sent in. More recently, they have resorted to appealing for workers in Ireland to unite. Working class unity is essential, but for now it is an empty slogan. The Orange State will not sit by and let it happen. And nor will the British state. When just such a united working class movement developed in 1932, it was killed off by Loyalist politicians and trade union bureaucrats. The mistake that Militant and the SWP both make is to think that Loyalism is just an ideology, a system of reactionary ideas. The SWP even believe that the crucial struggle in the 6 Counties is "the battle of ideas". This is not so. The power of Loyalism is not about ideas: if it was, it would have died years ago. The power of Loyalism lies in the Orange State - and ultimately in the 30,000 troops and military police at its disposal.

● One republican summed it up: "Until the 6 Counties border goes, until the threat is lifted from the heads of the minority that they're going to be wiped out in the next Loyalist pogrom, then normal politics... just doesn't have a look in." It is partition and the Orange State that divide the working class, not republican resistance. It is stupid to believe that workers can unite to fight on bread-and-butter issues simply by ignoring the one issue that divides them.

Having said that, the situation is anything but static. Loyalism is a cross-class alliance: that means that it could be undermined by economic cutbacks and re-structuring. One example is the proposed privatisation of Harland and Wolff, which will almost certainly lead to redundancies. And the Lisburn DHSS strike in 1986 was a fine example of what could be: a

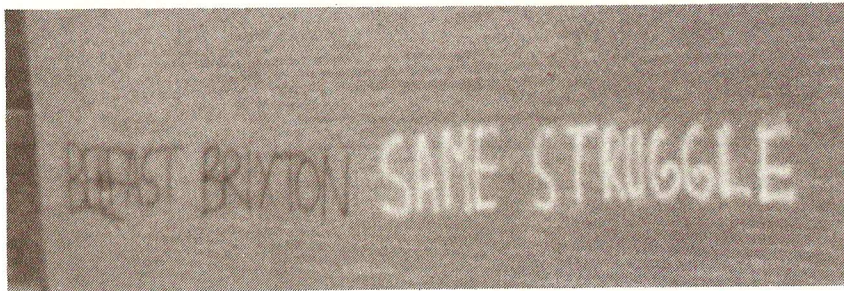
workforce united against the threat of Loyalist attacks on Catholic workers. But on the whole, these are exceptions that prove the rule: normal class politics, in an abnormal statelet, are generally impossible.



● "A battle of ideas"? Derry, 1969



Finally, there is another train of thought. It declares that all forms of nationalism, national liberation and national self-determination are basically reactionary - whatever socialist rhetoric they might use. For such people, fighting for a British withdrawal and the end of partition isn't just a waste of time: it actually plays into the hands of the enemy. There is a small grain of truth somewhere in this dogma. Nationalism as a rule is used to smother class differences. Even radical nationalist movements, like Irish republicanism, usually serve up the same old capitalism in a different sauce. But such a purist attitude is only ever used as an excuse for not doing anything. The idea of waiting for a 'pure' revolution is laughable. As Connolly said: "revolution is never practical - until the hour of revolution strikes." And revolutions involve getting your hands dirty. It's the same in Ireland. Again, Connolly is a fine example. Just before he was executed, he said: "the socialists will never understand why I am here." And many so-called socialists still refuse to understand. The struggle in Ireland may take the form of a fight against imperialism. But the spectre of a war against capitalism is never very far behind.



## 9. Tiocfaidh ar la: Our day will come

There is a massive level of struggle in Ireland. In the 6 Counties it takes an obvious form. But the 26 Counties aren't exactly peaceful: in 1972, Bloody Sunday sparked off a massive wave of anger, culminating in the British Embassy being burnt down. Again, during the 1981 Hunger Strike, there were demonstrations and riots in Dublin as working class kids chanted "Gardai = RUC!" And it's not just that the North can spark off the South. The Southern working class has a history of militancy in its own right, actually topping the world strike league in 1964 and 1965. This history of struggle is central, for it is only through real struggle that ideas ever change.

Of course, we reject any idea that the struggle for real socialism should be delayed until after re-unification. But even the people who believe this bunk accept that no minority movement will force the British state to withdraw. Deep down, they know that withdrawal is only possible with a mass working class movement, North and South of the border. The end of partition in these conditions means the end of the 26 county state. And it will mean the end of a whole lot more besides.

There is a historical parallel for all of this. Between the end of World War One and partition, there was a genuine mass struggle against British imperialism. It had begun even while the war was on with a general strike against conscription. And then after the general election of 1918, when republicanism was massively endorsed, a guerilla war started. The British state poured in thousands of troops while the newly renamed IRA grew



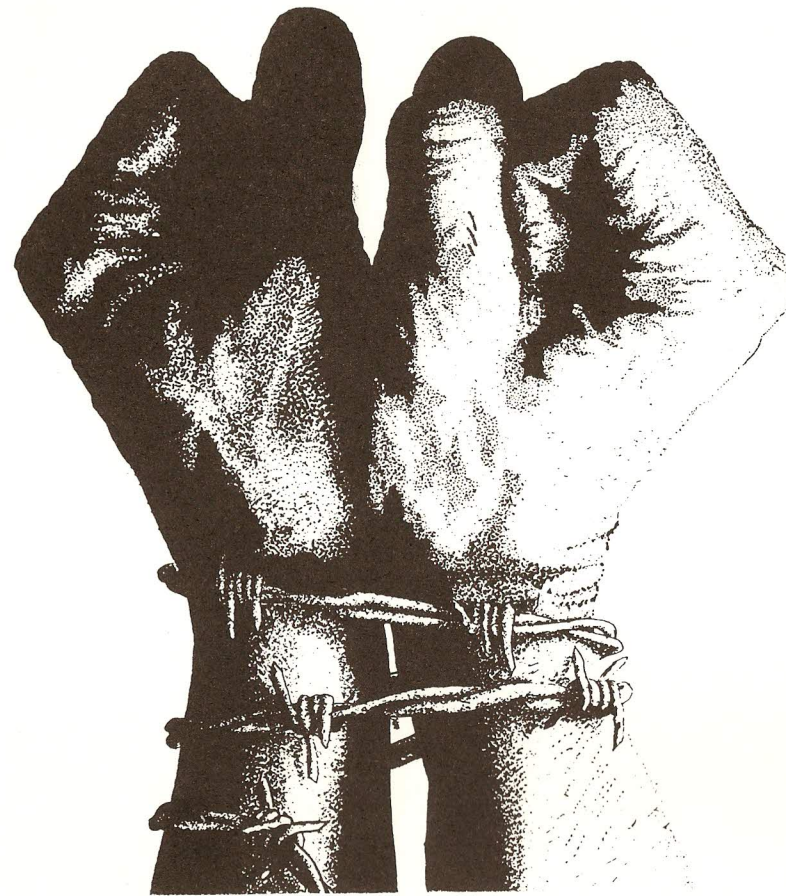
rapidly in strength. No-go zones were established, and smallholders and landless peasants seized large estates and divided them up. The revolt against British rule boiled over into open class warfare. In some areas, the IRA were used to protect private property and put an end to land seizures. But in others, where more people were actively involved, the IRA disobeyed orders and joined in enthusiastically.

Meanwhile April 1919 saw a general strike in Limerick after the British Army tried to declare martial law in the city. A Strike Committee sprang up and the Limerick Soviet was born. The following year saw more general strikes, in support of republican prisoners, and a strike by dockers and railworkers who refused to handle British Army munitions. The famous Knocklong Soviet Creamery was established when 50 workers took over one of the largest creameries in Ireland. In 1921 there were even more occupations and strikes: coal mines in county Leitrim were taken over, and in September the port of Cork was seized by the workers and run as a soviet. It was an attempted revolution that not only challenged British imperialism: it actually threatened capitalist rule itself.

The uprising was crushed. It was defeated militarily, by sheer weight of force, and politically, by partition. But it also lacked a real solidarity movement in this country. This time around, the withdrawal of the British state and the smashing of the Orange State will unleash another massive class struggle in Ireland. And there is another analogy here. In the early 1970s Portugal was forced to withdraw from its former colonies in Angola and Mozambique. The working class in Portugal saw that the Portuguese state could be defeated, and so 1974 was a period of massive upheaval and near-revolution. Angola is thousands of miles away from Portugal; Ireland is separated from us by a few miles of water.

The struggle in Ireland is not a 'perfect' struggle. We have no illusions about that. But we're not scared of getting our hands dirty in the fight to get the troops out. Like it or not, the struggle against the British state in Ireland is a revolutionary struggle. And that struggle is our struggle. ●

**Until all are free**



**we are all imprisoned**



# ● Appendices



## Bringing the war home

For those of us living in Britain, the key to destroying British imperialism is bringing the Irish war home to this country. The late unlamented Tory MP, Sir John Biggs-Davidson, hit the nail on the head: "if we lose in Belfast, we may have to fight in Brixton or Birmingham." We need to organise to make sure that the British state loses in Belfast, as it loses here in Brixton and Birmingham.

It can be done - and the British state knows it. That's why it puts so much effort into the myths, lies and anti-Irish racism that dominate the media.

It is a sign of the times that the name of a horse maimed in 1982 is better known than any of the numerous children murdered by plastic bullets. Use of such adorable symbols as Sefton the horse are part and parcel of the British state propaganda machine's work against the struggle in the 6 Counties. It is the same time and time again. Everyone remembers Enniskillen, but who remembers Gerald Flynn, a three year old child run over by a British Army Landrover in June 1988? Or Aidan McAnespie who was shot dead by a British soldier while walking to a football match in February 1988? Or Private Ian Thayne, the only British soldier ever found guilty of murder in the 6 Counties, released after just two years in prison and now back in the Army? The list is endless. We must make the names of Flynn, McAnespie, Thayne and all the others as well known as the names of Sefton and Enniskillen: this is a start to smashing the myths of the British state.



The main Irish solidarity group in Britain is the Troops Out Movement (TOM). TOM has some faults, but it is basically a non-sectarian organisation working with the two demands of 'Troops Out' and 'Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole'. TOM publishes a monthly magazine ('Troops Out'), while its local branches hold public meetings and organise demonstrations and pickets. TOM is active in other campaigns, such as the Birmingham Six and the Stop Strip-Searching campaigns. In addition TOM is responsible for an annual delegation to Belfast, which is jointly organised with Sinn Fein. There are local TOM branches throughout the UK: contact TOM at PO Box 353, London NW5 4NH. Another group worth contacting is the Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG) at 245a Coldharbour Lane, Brixton, London SW9.

If you want to keep up with what's really going on behind the lies of the British media, it's well worth reading 'An Phoblacht/Republican News'. It's available from most left-wing bookshops, or direct from 51-55 Falls Road, Belfast. The republican movement also produces an occasional magazine, 'Iris', which is available from the same address. In Britain, much of this news is covered in 'Troops Out', the monthly magazine of TOM (PO Box 353, London NW5 4NH). Other news of the struggle in Ireland, and of class struggle around the world, can be found in such publications as 'Counter-Information' (Pigeonhole Cl, c/o 11 Forth Street, Edinburgh, Scotland), 'Direct Action' (PO Box 761, Camberwell SDO, London SE5 9JH) and the left-wing press ('Red Action', 'Socialist Worker', 'Workers Power' etc).

Of course, the best way to support a revolution is to start our own. For those of us living in Britain, our struggles can only start where we are. As things get worse, Britain will start to look more and more like the 6 Counties. There are three groups worth mentioning who fight for working class revolution: the Anarchist Communist Federation (PO Box 125, Coventry CV3 5QT), the Class War Federation (PO Box 467, London E8 3QX) and the Direct Action Movement (PO Box 761, Camberwell SDO, London SE5 9JH). It is not essential to join any one of these groups. But the only way to change the world is to organise together in our own workplaces and communities against our common enemy.



## Recommended reading

If you want more details about the history of the Irish struggle, these are some of the books that we have found most useful. They are not in any particular order.

- 'The Longest War' by Kevin Kelley (Brandon/Zed). An excellent history, but the latest edition is spoilt by a liberal conclusion.
- 'Northern Ireland: The Orange State' by Michael Farrell (Pluto Press). A detailed account of the 6 County statelet.
- 'The Crack' by Sally Belfrage (Grafton). A record of one journalist's year in Belfast, full of personal recollections and stories from all sides.
- 'War And An Irish Town' by Eammon McCann (Pluto Press). A first-hand account of the battle for Derry in 1969. Brilliant.
- 'Only The Rivers Run Free' by Eileen Fairweather, Roisin McDonough and Melanie McFadyean (Pluto Press). A stirring account of the Irish war as experienced by women. Recommended.
- 'Ireland: The Propaganda War' by Liz Curtis (Pluto Press). A systematic expose of how the British media has conspired to lie about the war.
- 'Twenty Years On' edited by Michael Farrell (Brandon). A series of articles by people active in the struggle in the 1960s.
- 'Out of the Maze' by Derek Dunne (Gill and Macmillan). The true story of the biggest jail-break since 1945, when 38 IRA members escaped from the Maze prison in 1983.
- 'Ten Men Dead' by David Beresford (Grafton). An account of the 1981 Hunger Strike, how the British state dealt with it and its wider impact on the war.
- 'No Time For Love' by Hugo Meenan (Brandon). A blood, guts and thunder novel about the war in Ireland, written from personal experience.
- 'The Irish Civil War' by Frances Blake (Information on Ireland). A short account of the near-revolution in 1922-23.
- 'One Day in My Life' by Bobby Sands (Pluto Press). A moving record of one day in Long Kesh.
- 'Cormac Strikes Back' by Cormac (Information on Ireland). An excellent collection of comic strips by a socialist republican cartoonist.
- 'Peggy Deery: A Derry Family at War' by Nell McCafferty (Virago). An account of one Derry family's life in the 1970s and 1980s. Brilliant and moving.
- 'Trinity' by Leon Uris (Grafton). A gripping historical novel about life in Ireland in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Well worth reading.

## Chronology

- 1170 First English invasion of Ireland
- 1250 Normans complete conquest of Ireland
- 1541 Henry VIII declares himself ruler of all Ireland
- 1598 Major Gaelic uprising led by O'Neill and O'Donnell clans
- 1608 Six of Ulster's nine counties planted with Scottish and English settlers
- 1641 Irish uprising
- 1649 Cromwell invades Ireland and starts a bloody reconquest
- 1690 Catholic King James defeated at the Battle of the Boyne by Protestant King William
- 1798 United Irishmen's uprising defeated
- 1800 Act of Union creates a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland
- 1847 Famine: 3 million die or emigrate
- 1848 Young Ireland uprising put down
- 1886 First Home Rule Bill defeated
- 1905 Sinn Fein formed
- 1907 Belfast strike wave unites Protestant and Catholic workers
- 1912 Home Rule Bill defeated again
- 1913 Massive strike in Dublin
- 1916 Easter Rising defeated
- 1918 Sinn Fein wins 73 out of 105 Irish seats at Westminster
- 1919 Sinn Fein forms Dail Eireann. IRA launch war for an Irish Republic
- 1920 Black and Tans rampage across Ireland. Wave of strikes and occupations. Government of Ireland Act passed, allowing for partition
- 1921 Truce declared
- 1922 Dail ratifies Treaty: civil war begins in 26 Counties
- 1923 Anti-Treaty forces defeated. 26 county government established
- 1932 Mass demonstrations and riots across the North against the Poor Laws, involving Protestant and Catholic workers
- 1935 Sectarian anti-Catholic riots return to Belfast
- 1956 IRA starts Border Campaign: internment introduced North and South
- 1962 Border Campaign called off
- 1966 UVF opens sectarian campaign, killing two Catholic civilians
- 1967 NICRA formed
- 1968 Civil Rights march in Derry attacked
- 1969 Loyalist/RUC invasion of the Falls. Battle of the Bogside leads to the British Army being sent in





- 1970 IRA splits into Provisionals and Officials over the war
- 1971 Provos shoot dead first British soldier. Internment introduced. Rent and rates strike
- 1972 Bloody Sunday in Derry: 13 demonstrators shot dead. Stormont collapses and direct rule imposed. Officials call unconditional ceasefire. Shortlived Provo truce breaks down. Dublin brings in anti-IRA laws
- 1974 Loyalist strike kills off power-sharing executive. Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) rushed in after Birmingham pub bombings. IRSP formed after split in Official Sinn Fein
- 1975 IRA ceasefire declared and incident centres opened. Internment ends
- 1976 Ceasefire officially ends. Labour government withdraws special category status for prisoners. Relatives Action Committee formed as blanket protest begins
- 1977 Officials feud with Provos and assassinate IRSP leader in Dublin
- 1978 Dirty protest begins in prisons
- 1979 National H-Block/Armagh Committee formed
- 1980 First hunger strike starts and then ends in confusion
- 1981 Second Hunger Strike for political status. Bobby Sands elected as MP before his death. Nine more hunger-strikers die. Mass demonstrations across Ireland: 7 killed by plastic bullets
- 1982 Supergrass policy results in hundreds of suspected republicans being arrested

- 1983 Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein President, elected as MP. 'Great Escape' as 38 bust out from Maze prison
- 1984 John Downes shot dead on annual anti-internment rally in Belfast. Wave of SAS/RUC shoot-to-kill attacks
- 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement provokes Loyalist backlash
- 1986 Sectarian Loyalist riots against Anglo-Irish Agreement. Sinn Fein drops abstentionist policy for 26 Counties: several walk out to form Republican Sinn Fein
- 1987 Internal INLA feud leaves several dead. 8 IRA Volunteers killed in SAS ambush at Loughgall. Dublin passes bill to allow extradition of republicans to the North
- 1988 3 IRA Volunteers assassinated in Gibraltar. Their funeral is attacked by Loyalist gunman. Censorship imposed by law on Sinn Fein members. Dublin begins extradition
- 1989 Loyalist murder-gangs start yet another wave of shoot-to-kill attacks. Twentieth anniversary of re-occupation of Ireland by British Army



# Attack International

We are a small revolutionary propaganda group. We aim to spread ideas and information that help to incite, support and develop struggle by the working class against capitalism and the state. We have produced a number of leaflets, posters and so on, as well as a paper ('Attack') and a book ('Breaking Free'). We plan to produce more in the future. If you would like to receive any of these publications, please send a (large?!) donation to us. And if you want a copy of 'Breaking Free', please send £2.00 (all cheques made payable to Attack International). And, of course, all donations are very welcome. Please contact us at BM 6577, London, WC1N 3XX, England.

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