

Ireland and British Imperialism

Workers Solidarity Movement

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Contents

Introduction	5
WHY IRELAND IS PARTITIONED	6
The North East	6
Engineering	6
Shipbuilding	7
The South	7
Partition	7
The South	8
Civil Rights	8
Sectarian	8
Sinn Féin	9
Unity	9
Socialism	9
LESSONS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT	11
Blaming the IRA	11
Border Campaign	11
Civil Rights	12
Jobs and Houses	12
Hardly Radical	13
Believe it or Not!	13
Dangerously Subversive	14
“Men of Violence”	14
“Unnecessary Reforms”	14
Burntollet	15
As Clear as Day	15
The Army Arrives Back	16
Birth of the Provos	16
Breeding the Anger	16
GETTING TO GRIPS WITH SINN FEIN’S SOCIALISM	18
The Way Forward?	18
Mystical Nonsense	18
Class Struggle	19
Protestants	19
Redividing Poverty?	20
South of the Border	20

The Meaning of Socialism	20
Sinn Féin Policy	21
Back to Basics	22
ANGLO-IRISH DEAL...THE ANARCHIST ALTERNATIVE	23
Published in Workers Solidarity no. 13, December 1985	23
Civil Rights	23
Honesty”	23
Nationalism	24
Bigotry	24
WHEN THE RED FLAG FLEW IN MUNSTER	25
Limerick	25
Motor Permits Strike	25
Cleeves	25
Knocklong	26
Occupation	26
IRA Aided Bosses	26
Wave of Occupations	27
Successes	27
1916: WHAT ARE YOU COMMEMORATING?	28
Nationalists	28
Equality	28
Executions	29
Workers Republic	29
MURDER GANG TARGETS CATHOLICS	30
Historic?	30
Diplock	30
Backlash	31
Bigots	31
Marginal	31
Threat	31
Real Enemy	31
WORKERS STRIKE AGAINST THE BIGOTS	33
Murdered	33
Divide and Rule	33
Strikes	34
History	34
Uproot	34
WHEN THE FALLS AND THE SHANKILL FOUGHT TOGETHER	35
Poor Laws	35
Poverty	35

Organising	36
Demands	36
Workhouse	36
Rioting	37
Rent Strike	37
RUC Murders	38
Mill Workers	38
Deaths	38
Single Persons	39
Stalin	39
Unionism	39
“Leaders”	40
WORKERS’ ACTION IS THE ANSWER	41

Introduction

Hardly a day goes by without a killing or bombing in the six counties. The media presents this as the fault of a few “men of violence”, a problem which could be overcome if “sensible” politicians would only sit down at the same table and agree a solution. The solutions put forward by these “sensible” politicians inevitably centre on isolating the Provos and allowing “normal politics” to develop.

The reality of their solution has been increased sectarianism, rubber bullets and lead bullets. Even former republican internee and Democratic Left leader, Proinsias de Rossa, has joined this chorus of repression by saying that internment without trial is an acceptable measure.

None of these ‘solutions’ face up to the fact that there is such a thing as imperialism. None start from the position that a real solution must be based on the needs of the working class. To work out such a solution we must first understand what the problem is and what forces are involved. We must understand the difference between the problem and the reaction to it.

This pamphlet is a collection of articles from the pages of the Irish anarchist magazine Workers Solidarity. They deal with many of the important questions we face in relation to imperialism and the republican resistance to it. Why was Ireland partitioned? How does this affect working class struggles? How can we combat sectarianism? How can the working class be united? What brought the IRA and Sinn Féin into existence and who do they represent? Can they unite Ireland? Can they introduce socialism? What do they mean when they talk of socialism?

The validity of these articles and the anarchist approach to understanding the conflict is shown by the fact that they are just as valid today as when they were written in the 1980’s. All are reprinted without any editing or alterations. Of course this means that some of the events referred to may not be widely known now. However most events were important enough to be remembered today (e.g. the Anglo Irish Agreement) or are events which are still common (e.g. sectarian murders).

One addition to this second edition is an article about the IRA policy of killing workers who are employed in work for the British forces. It is an article which puts forward the anarchist approach in stark contrast to the militarist methods of republicanism.

As Irish anarchists we have been and are active around issues which effect working class people throughout Ireland. These articles are based on our anarchist politics. Our politics are developed and strengthened by our experience. If you agree with our analysis, get in touch and find out more about anarchism.

WHY IRELAND IS PARTITIONED

Published in Workers Solidarity no. 9, August 1985

The rising fortunes of Sinn Féin, and the Loyalist backlash, have once again focused attention on the North. The bitterly sectarian nature of Loyalism is there for all to see. But the rise of Sinn Féin is also opening up a debate on how we can go about getting rid of the border. Below we look at the nature of the Northern State and show that partition was, and still is, in the interests of the British and Irish ruling classes and that only by basing ourselves on the working class and arguing for a real socialist alternative can we win.

Partition did not just happen, nor was it a matter of keeping different religions apart. Partition made good economic sense to the bosses and it reflected the uneven economic development of the country at the time.

As a British colony Ireland could not be allowed to offer any real economic competition to Britain. The economy of the country was run to suit the interests of the British. Thus in the 17th century laws were passed by the English government which discriminated against Irish trade.

The North East

Industrialisation in the North-East of the country was initially based on the linen industry which did not threaten any British industry. That it was able to develop in the North-East was due to the plantations of the 17th century. Large tracts of land were handed over to English landlords and adventurers. They were given these lands unconditionally and tended to stock them with animals.

In the North-East however, lands were entrusted to 'undertakers' who were required to bring over English and Scottish settlers to colonise the province. These Presbyterian colonists who settled in Ulster came from areas of small scale independent commodity farming and weaving. Many brought with them their small capital savings and basic skills in linen manufacture.

Engineering

Other factors which allowed industry to develop in the North-East included the fact that the Belfast area had abundant water power and a good harbour. Also at the end of the 18th century the short-lived cotton industry which was centred around Belfast provided a model for the reorganisation of the linen industry using machines. An engineering industry grew up based on the maintenance of these machines.

Shipbuilding

In the 1850's, it became cheaper to build ships from iron rather than wood. Belfast was in an ideal position to benefit from this change. It had available land, a deep water harbour and an enterprising Harbour Commission. Again from this new industry other supplementary industries sprung up. In all of this the access these industries had to British markets was of key importance. The Irish home market was too small and even in the 18th century the linen industry relied on the English market for its further expansion. Likewise shipbuilding, which by 1915 employed one quarter of the male Labour force in Ulster, depended on exports for its survival.

The South

In the South the picture was very different. The plantations had left a situation where the land was owned by absentee English landlords who let their lands at a fixed rate to resident middlemen who sublet the rest of it in very small holdings to the peasants. The peasant had no security of tenure and could be evicted at any time at the whim of the landlord or his agent.

In this situation the linen industry failed to establish itself in the South because of the lack of skilled weavers and the lack of capital to invest in manufacture. Of course the major factor was that Irish agriculture was highly specialised to meet the needs of the British economy. Basically this meant concentrating on the production of foodstuffs.

Partition

When partition occurred it reflected this uneven economic development. It was in the interests of the bosses in the North to remain part of Britain. The North depended on Britain for its new capital, its raw materials, its trade and markets. On the contrary the South's industrial development had hardly begun and was having a hard time starting in the face of British competition. The interests of Irish capitalism demanded an independent Irish government with the power to impose tariffs on foreign imports in order to protect its infant industries. This is what Sinn Féin stood for.

This demand for protectionism was dramatically opposed to the economic interests of the Northern capitalists.

Unfortunately Protestant workers also saw their interests tied up with the maintenance of the link with Britain. For them, a united capitalist Ireland breaking from Britain would mean job losses and thus lower standards of living. The bosses understood and played on this fear. They used the fact that there was a Protestant majority in the North to keep workers divided. Through the Orange Order they spread the notion that the greatest threat to Protestant workers was Catholic workers both inside Ulster and out. Thus when partition occurred only six counties were included in the Northern State. This ensured that there was a permanent Protestant majority and a Catholic minority. In all of this the Unionist bosses were supported by the British ruling class. They feared the spread of protectionism in the empire and knew that a divided working class could be more easily dominated.

After partition the North became truly a 'Protestant State for a Protestant People'. Privileges were handed out to Protestants in the form of jobs and houses. Proportional representation was

abolished and gerrymandering was such that even in a city like Derry, where Catholics formed 63% of the population, the unionists controlled the local council.

Everywhere it was made clear that the interests of the Protestant workers lay with the Protestant bosses. These owned the factories and made sure that only Protestants were employed in them. Protestants were given nearly all the jobs in the Unionist run civil service.

This was all managed through the Ulster Unionist Council, an umbrella organisation including Unionist Party branches and the Orange Lodges. It was all backed up by the Special Powers Act which allowed for internment. Then there was the armed RUC and B Specials to implement this law.

The South

Down South partition had favoured those big farmers and ranchers, represented by Cumann na nGael, who did not want protectionism as they depended on exporting cattle for their survival. They wanted to stop the struggle for independence at this stage because they feared its transformation in a social upheaval. In the thirties Fianna Fail which represented the small farmers and capitalists who did want protectionism came to power. They set about raising tariff barriers. This policy as is well known, was a complete failure, the only result of it being emigration to Britain.

In the sixties these policies were abandoned for policies aimed at attracting foreign multinationals. That is still the policy today.

A similar change occurred in the North. Its industrial base was narrow, and failure to diversify meant that its economy was vulnerable. Between 1949 and 1969 120,000 jobs were lost in the three main industries. So in the six counties there was also a turn to foreign firms. Thus by 1974 44% of all manufacturing employment was created by 24 subsidiaries of British or American corporations.

Civil Rights

When the Civil Rights Movement appeared, it was based on the Catholic middle classes' demand to participate as equals with the Protestants. This middle class had been created by the intervention of those foreign firms whose employment policies were not controlled by the Unionists. Also the post-war Welfare State had made it possible for Catholics to go to universities.

The point is that the Civil Rights Movement had not set out to smash the Northern state. It sought reforms only. Some were conceded but only after Catholics had been battered off the streets and the British Army had intervened. This intervention was not in order to protect the Catholics as is often stated, but to protect the status quo. The RUC had lost control and order had to be re-established.

Sectarian

Fundamentally the Northern State is still sectarian. The Orange card is still used to divide workers. Catholics still suffer from discrimination, and they are still being batted off the streets, shot at or imprisoned. Economically it's no longer profitable for Britain to stay but it will not

leave until stability can be ensured and at the moment the ruling class of Britain and Ireland cannot ensure this. So the policy is one of repression against anti-imperialists, North and South.

We are against partition because of the effect that it has on the Irish working class. It has led to, as Connolly predicted a 'carnival of reaction' both North and South. The only way that it can be overcome is through working class unity and socialism. Not the working class unity of the Workers Party which denies the importance of the border and calls for unity on 'bread and butter' issues. The Workers Party believes that the Orange state can be reformed. They want a Bill of Rights to protect the rights of Catholics. They want the sectarian RUC and UDR to ensure that this bill of rights is implemented. How naive?

Sinn Féin

But on the other hand Sinn Féin do not even care about workers unity. They rightly understand that the Northern State must be smashed but to them, getting rid of the border comes before winning socialism. Thus they see alliances with the SDLP and sections of Fianna Fail. Their central slogan is 'One Nation One People'. They do not accept that class is the central division in society. Thus their appeal is exclusively Catholic and nationalist.

Connolly was right when he asserted that the struggle for national freedom could only be successful as part of the struggle for socialism. He pointed to the need for working class leadership in the national struggle and indeed it was the lack of such a leadership that provided the unionist bosses with a mass base from which to mount opposition to independence.

Unity

Almost 40,000 Protestant workers had shown through the 1919 Engineering Strike that they could take on their Unionist bosses but without independent working class politics in the struggle against Britain there was little likelihood of northern workers' economic militancy turning into political opposition to British rule.

Workers in the north have also shown that they can unite as they did in the 1932 Outdoor Relief Strike. The unity that was forged was undermined by the fact that the Orange bosses could distribute concrete privileges to Protestants and thus encourage the re-emergence of sectarianism.

Socialism

But to some extent their ability to do this has changed. Industry, and thus the control of jobs, is no longer owned by native Presbyterians. As in the South foreign firms are in control. Also allocation of housing and welfare is more centralised and less controlled by local bigoted councils. This is not to say that sectarianism does not exist but to point out that there are new possibilities.

The key is in the South. A determined working class anti-imperialist movement is the only guarantee of the end of partition. Why should we fight for anything less than socialism. For workers there is little to be gained from spreading what is in the twenty six counties to the six. What we fight for is not to take away from Protestants and give to Catholics but for more of everything — houses, jobs, education — and socialism is the only guarantee that they will be

provided. By going forward on this basis we can deprive the Unionists of the mass base which was used to force a compromise sixty years ago.

This is what the Workers Solidarity Movement is fighting for. We don't see workers unity as something abstract for the sake of which we give up all anti-imperialist struggle in the here and now. We fight against repression North and South and do not pander to reactionary Protestant or Catholic ideas, but at the same time we say that only the working class can unite this country, as they are the only people with anything to gain, and only through socialism can the country be united.

LESSONS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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If there is a growth industry in Ireland at the moment it must be the rewriting of history. According to the people involved, who include the Labour and Workers Parties, it was the Peoples Democracy (PD) march from Belfast to Derry that stirred up sectarianism and the Provisional IRA which turned a peaceful protest movement into a violent and bloody one. The logic that flows from this is that the IRA are the primary problem and until the London and Dublin governments are able to totally smash them there will be little or no progress in the North.

This is why the Labour Party, both inside and outside coalition governments, has supported special non jury courts, broadcasting censorship, 'emergency' laws and the extradition of political prisoners. This is why the Workers Party calls for support for the RUC, calling them 'the best community police force in the world'. Though quick to condemn violence whether it comes from republican or loyalist paramilitaries they never seem to have anything to say about the violence of the British army, police or UDR. They go so far as to describe Sinn Féin as 'fascist'. Their attitude is a lot closer to a moderate Unionist Party than one which calls itself socialist. And that explains the praise they have received from people like former UDR major and Official Unionist MP Ken Magennis and ex-Northern Ireland Tory Secretary of State James Prior.

Blaming the IRA

After twenty years of seemingly endless death, injury and destruction the 'blame the IRA' school of thought has a certain attraction for many people who find it difficult to understand why the fighting started and why it is still going on. But it offers absolutely no solution, instead it serves as an additional prop to imperialism and the six county statelet it set up. Regardless of its intentions it helps to perpetuate the problem.

If a problem exists it is necessary to look for its cause before one can set about solving it. The cause in the North is the state itself. While all states represent rule over the majority (the working class) by a minority (the bosses) there is something special about the Northern one. When it was created in 1921 it was done so on the basis of religious discrimination. Governments and bosses have consistently and deliberately secured the loyalty of Protestants by giving them marginal privileges over Catholics.

Border Campaign

By the 1960s the IRA had almost disappeared, its 1956 to 1962 border campaign having been an abject failure. It retained only a handful of active members and was regarded by most working

class Catholics as a thing of the past. But something else was stirring. The Catholic middle class had given up waiting for a united Ireland and instead began to look for equality of opportunity within the six county set-up. The increased access to university education raised their aspirations and made them less willing to passively accept a second class citizenship. The Catholic working class, equally was more concerned with concrete improvements in their day to day lives than with dreams of unity with the South.

Discrimination within the North was the issue. Of 319 administrative positions at Stormont only 23 were held by Catholics while in the technical and professional grades there were 196 Protestants but only 13 Catholics. In Fermanagh, a county with a Catholic majority, the County Council employed 338 Protestants and just 32 Catholics. This pattern was repeated across the North in both the public sector and in private industry. A striking example of what this meant hit the headlines in 1968 when a council house in Caledon, County Tyrone was occupied by civil rights protesters. It had been allocated to a single 18 year old Protestant over the heads of a long waiting list of Catholics some of whom had as many as 12 children and were forced to live in overcrowded conditions with relatives or in damp and cramped caravans.

Civil Rights

To combat these myriad inequalities the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed in 1967. Many of its early members were drawn from the Dungannon based Campaign for Social Justice, a middle class grouping who had been collecting data on discrimination since 1964, along with some members of the Republican Movement and the Communist Party of Northern Ireland. Its demands were: one man – one vote; allocation of housing on a points system; redrawing of gerrymandered electoral boundaries; repeal of the Special Powers Act; abolition of the B Specials; and laws against discrimination in local government.

An understanding of these demands shows the sort of society that had been in existence since 1921. “One man – one vote” was counterpoised to the situation where business people were allowed multiple votes and people who were not ratepayers (tenants in private accommodation, lodgers, etc.) had no vote. Gerrymandering was commonplace. Derry had a population of 36,000 Catholics and 17,000 Protestants. Elections to the Corporation always returned a safe Protestant/Unionist majority. This was achieved by splitting the city into three wards and only allocating housing to Catholics in one of them.

Jobs and Houses

Laws against discrimination in local government speak for themselves, especially when Catholics were finding it a lot harder to get local authority jobs and Catholic areas were granted fewer services. In some cases they received almost none. The call for a housing points system was to replace the set-up where local councillors decided among themselves who got housed and did not have to take into account anything other than their own prejudices.

The Special Powers Act gave the Stormont Minister for Home Affairs absolute power to arrest people on “suspicion” of endangering the State and to imprison them without trial. It also empowered him to send police raiding parties into homes without warrants, impound any property

without giving a reason, suspend Habeas Corpus and even abolish inquests. It contained an additional clause giving him the authority to do anything he wished even if it was not specifically mentioned in the Act. The B Specials were effectively the state-paid part-time armed militia of the Unionist Party and were notorious for their bigotry and brutality.

Hardly Radical

The NICRA demands were hardly radical. They were the minimum required for any country that even pretends to be democratic. The association did not raise the border issue or adopt any republican policies. The original members had mostly been middle class Catholics who were willing to work within the system. Throughout their lives they had been told that, like it or not, they were British subjects. All right, they reasoned, if we are supposed to be British we should enjoy the same conditions and protections as all the other residents of the United Kingdom. The nationalist/republican arguments were not important to them at that time, they were not too impressed by the clerically influenced gombeen society they saw on the other side of the border.

In August 1968 NICRA took to the streets for the first time with a 2,500 strong march from Coalisland to Dungannon to protest against local housing discrimination. Since 1945 71% of local authority houses had gone to Protestants in an area with a 53% Catholic population. The demonstration was a friendly and almost carefree one despite threats from Ian Paisley's Ulster Protestant Volunteers who had occupied the market square in Dungannon to deny access to the 'taigs'. The loyalist presence that day was a warning of what would come if the Catholics didn't quietly go home and accept their inferior status.

Believe it or Not!

Loyalist bigots did all they could to incite sectarian hatred. Typical was the claim by Paisley that the Civil Rights campaign was a Sinn Féin front whose intention was to drive the Protestants 'into the sea'. In his paper, the Protestant Telegraph, he printed what purported to be the Sinn Féin 'oath'. It was claimed republicans swore that: "These Protestant robbers and brutes, these unbelievers in our faith, will be driven like the swine that they are into the sea by force, the knife or by poison cup until we of the Catholic faith and avowed supporters of all Sinn Féin actions and principles clear these heretics from our land... At any cost, we must work and seek using any method of deception to gain our ends, towards the destruction of all Protestants and the advancement of the priesthood and the Catholic faith until the Pope is the complete ruler of the whole world. "

A second civil rights march was announced for October 5th in Derry. Stormont Home Affairs Minister William Craig banned it. After local left wing activists and the Derry Labour Party said they would take to the streets regardless of any ban, the NICRA leadership agreed to go ahead with the march. 2,000 set off. Almost immediately their way was blocked by lines of RUC. A short meeting was held and the NICRA leaders asked the crowd to disperse peacefully. When they tried to do just that they found more RUC blocking the other end of the street. The police charged into the demonstrators battoning, kicking and punching. Eighty eight were injured and another thirty six were arrested. Then a water cannon was brought up which sprayed marchers, shoppers and local residents alike.

Dangerously Subversive

Stormont had given notice that it was not prepared to allow people to peacefully demonstrate for equality. In their rotten little statelet even the most moderate democratic demands were considered dangerously subversive. However times had changed. Most people had a TV and when they saw pictures of blood spattered marchers whose only 'crime' had been to demand the passage of anti-discrimination legislation they began to ask questions. What sort of place are we living in? And how much longer are we going to put up with it?

In Belfast 800 students from Queens University, Catholic and Protestant, marched in protest and organised themselves into Peoples Democracy . It was to be a loose but active group, more radical than NICRA and contemptuous of the nationalist elements whose goal was no more than a few gains for Catholic professionals and politicians. It pointed out that while Protestants might be a little better off than Catholics they also suffered from low pay, bad housing, unemployment and that working class Protestant areas were just as likely to be denied proper amenities. Their aim was to unite the working class through common action on day-to-day issues, and to make this part of the civil rights campaign.

“Men of Violence”

Although the moderate leaders of the Civil Rights movement would have been only too happy to drive the campaign from the streets they knew that to do so would cue them off from most of their supporters who were furious about what had happened in Derry. The Catholic working class of Derry were going to march again regardless of what John Hume or Ivan Cooper said. Six weeks after the RUC attack 15,000 marched in Derry, an unheard of number for an anti-Unionist protest at that time. Being outnumbered 50:1 by demonstrators who were not in any mood to be told they could not march in their own city the RUC had little choice but to hide away in their police stations. With these 'men of violence' absent there was no trouble.

The Labour government in London which had previously not even discussed Northern Ireland in parliament, told Unionist Prime Minister Terence O'Neill that it was time for a few reforms to cool things down. On November 22nd 1968 O'Neill unveiled his package of reforms. Council housing would be allocated on a points system, the extra votes of business people would be abolished, a Development Commission would be appointed to replace Derry Corporation, the Special Powers Act would be 'reviewed and an ombudsman would be employed to hear complaints of discrimination. This was enough to satisfy, at least for a time, the majority of 'respectable' civil rights leaders including most of the NICRA executive.

“Unnecessary Reforms”

Other reactions were not so favourable to O'Neill. Paisley and his loyalist pals in the UVF accused him of giving in to 'disloyal elements', 'republicanism' and 'Popery'. Within the Unionist Party MP's started an 'O'Neill Must Go' campaign.

William Craig ranted about 'unnecessary reforms' and claimed there was absolutely no religious discrimination in Northern Ireland. Only one group of any size was neither satisfied or discredited, the Peoples Democracy. They held there was no guarantee that these few limited

reforms would be implemented, let alone enlarged to tackle all the other manifestations of discrimination. The promised scrapping of a handful of Unionism's worst excesses was hardly a great victory after 47 years of near dictatorship, pointed out the PD. The civil rights marches had shown that direct action can win gains and now was the time to step up the pressure.

Burntollet

Therefore PD decided to organise a march across the North, from Belfast to Derry, setting out on New Years Day 1969. The 100 or so marchers were met throughout the four day event with RUC barricades and forced to go down country lanes and across fields. When they reached Burntollet Bridge, just eight miles from Derry, they were attacked by about 350 loyalists throwing rocks and using clubs spiked with nails. Several marchers were seriously injured and a couple nearly killed. Many of the attackers were off duty B-Specials. The RUC accompanying the protest

refused to give any protection. Not one of the attackers was ever convicted in a court of law. O'Neill who was now being presented as a great reformer, went on TV to blame the victims for the violence and said "we have heard sufficient for now about civil rights. Let us hear a little about civic responsibility"

It was not enough for his opponents in the Unionist Party and on April 28th O'Neill resigned. His replacement Major James Chichester-Clark lasted less than two years because although he favoured more repression than O'Neill it was still not enough for most in the Unionist Party. Indeed Brian Faulkner who in turn replaced him and was even more repressive was nevertheless judged too moderate and was eventually banished to the political wilderness.

As Clear as Day

Something was so clear that only those who stuck their heads in the sand could not see it — the Northern State was unwilling and unable to implement a series of widespread and meaningful reforms. It had been built on the basis of a sectarian division, nurtured by bigotry and defended by thuggery. To talk of real reforms and of equality meant challenging the very basis of the state. It had not been the intention of most of the early civil rights activists but it was the reality they found themselves in.

Things finally boiled over on August 12th. The Apprentice Boys who were parading around Derry's walls demonstrated their contempt for the Catholics below by throwing pennies down into the Bogside. Some youngsters threw stones at the loyalists. It was unplanned and uncontrollable. The police responded with a vicious attack on the Bogside. Residents had their houses attacked and their heads split open. A riot developed. But the police had no idea of what was to happen this time.

The mainly Catholic working class Bogside and Creggan areas of Derry expelled the RUC, organised their own 500 strong defence force and built barricades. The police unleashed a vicious attack and fired hundreds of canisters of CS gas over the barricades. The area was defended with bricks and petrol bombs. People fought not only because they literally feared for their lives should the RUC get in but also because they had been humiliated and bloodied too often to now give up without a fight. The 'Battle of the Bogside' triggered smaller riots in other towns in an attempt to draw some of the RUC's forces from Derry.

The Army Arrives Back

At 5 PM on Thursday August 15th 1969 400 soldiers from the Prince of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment took up positions around the city. The British Army was again on the streets of Ireland. As later events were to prove they had not been deployed to protect people from the RUC and the B Specials. Harold Wilson's Labour government acted because the RUC were being beaten. No government will stand by while its monopoly of force is being brought into question. The army were sent in to uphold the authority of the state, to stop a counter-power developing.

Now it was Belfast that exploded. Loyalist vigilantes stormed the Falls on August 14 14th. Within a day and a half over 200 houses, nearly all of them occupied by Catholics, were burnt-out. RUC Landrovers sped up and down the Falls Road firing their Browning machine guns. The high velocity bullets from these have a range of two and a half miles and it is only with murderous intent that they would be sanctioned for use in densely populated urban areas. Ten people were killed and about 100 injured. The dead included a 9 year old boy shot as he lay in his bed and the first British soldier to die — a man home on leave who was shot by the RUC! His mistake was to visit his family in a Catholic area. (It is also worth recording that the first policeman to die, Constable Arbuckle, was shot by loyalists.)

Birth of the Provos

It was in this situation that the Provisional IRA was formed. The politics were old style Catholic republicanism, the immediate aim was to provide an armed defence against RUC and loyalist attacks on ghetto areas. Far from being the cause of violence, they arose as a response to the violence of the state. No matter how much we may disagree with their politics and their methods we have to recognise this.

Far from being a handful of gunmen who enjoy little or no support, everyone can see that one third of Northern Catholics, mainly from working class areas, vote for Sinn Féin. Despite all the ruling class's attempts to isolate them their support holds. The fact is that discrimination and repression continue and that is the ongoing source of the conflict. The 'bad old days' are not over.

Despite the Fair Employment Act of 1976 and the state-operated Fair Employment Agency, the FEA had to admit in 1987 that after twelve years in existence a Catholic man is still two and a half times as likely to be unemployed as his Protestant counterpart. In the aircraft and shipbuilding industries less than 5% of the workers are Catholics. The Sirocco Works, which is located in the Catholic Short Strand area of Belfast, has only 4 Catholic employees (0.4% of the workforce). This pattern is repeated throughout private industry. There has been some improvement in Catholic representation in the public sector — but only in the low pay jobs. Skilled work and promotion is largely denied to them.

Breeding the Anger

It is this discrimination combined with repression and brutality, that breeds the anger which is seen in support for the IRA. It is the violence of the Northern State and its masters in the British

ruling class which have made certain that twenty years after the Civil Rights marches the death and destruction continues.

The task of anarchists is to build a movement that can challenge the Northern and Southern states. Our goal is not a nationalist United Ireland. But that does not mean we are prepared to equate nationalism with imperialism, we will defend the Provos against the state and oppose the attempts to scapegoat them for the problems created by the boss class. However we are in no sense in political alliance with republicanism for our goal is very different. We stand for a united Workers' Republic based on socialism, workers' control and individual freedom. We will settle for nothing less.

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH SINN FEIN'S SOCIALISM

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Is Sinn Féin swinging to the left? It is as clear as day that there have been huge changes in the Republican Movement since the 1981 Hunger strike. What do these changes add up to, what sort of party is Sinn Féin today, what are its politics, what is its goal?

With the departure of many of the 'old guard' around Ruairi O'Bradaigh and their regroupment as Republican Sinn Féin, some in Sinn Féin argue there is now nothing to stop a continual shift leftwards. It is true that republicans are a lot more visible in community politics, opposing the cutbacks, fighting the heroin pushers. But that hardly adds up to a socialist programme.

The Way Forward?

Gerry Adams is not just the President of Sinn Féin, he is also the main spokesperson for their new radical ideas. Rather than putting words into his mouth we will be content to report what he has said is the way forward. "What is needed in Ireland especially in the 26 counties, is the development of an anti-imperialist movement... The programme of such a movement would appeal to all those capable of taking a national stand and would require a multi-sided campaign of national regeneration — an Irish Ireland movement to offset, especially in the 26 counties, the neo-colonial and anti-national mentality that exists there". (Politics of Irish Freedom, p 35.)

So there we have it. He does not call for the sort of anti-imperialist movement that will try to mobilise working class people because it is in their own class interest to uproot both rotten states in Ireland. And it is in our own interest to get rid of partition because it is part and parcel of the system that sets worker against worker while the bosses laugh all the way to the bank.

Mystical Nonsense

Instead we are asked to "regenerate" the nation, to build an "Irish Ireland" movement. Perhaps we fortify ourselves for this task by regular singing of the national anthem, waving the tricolour and listening to Wolfe Tones ballads. At bottom of all this lies the idea that we all have something very important in common, something that can unite all of us regardless of class, and that something is our "Irishness". Yet almost none of the Northern Protestants and increasingly large numbers of people in the 26 counties, are no longer attracted to such vague, mystical, nonsensical notions of nationalism. An over-riding sense of national identity is not much help when trying to stop further job cuts. It is not much consolation when you are failing to make ends meet on social welfare. (own selfish ends?) Maybe they could if the South was really totally under the thumb of London. But it is not. The Tories' studied insults on issues like the Birmingham Six and

the Stalker report into RUC murders does not change this. The Southern ruling class are junior partners in the western capitalist system. They negotiate their own terms within the EEC, they conduct their own foreign trade and their economy is not directly tied to that of Britain (which is why the current crisis hit us a few years later than Britain). They have no fundamental argument with their fellow bosses across the Irish sea.

Class Struggle

So, not only is it naive to look for an alliance with them but it would give an effective veto to whatever tiny section might be dragged into a temporary coalition with Sinn Féin. If you believe they are necessary then you won't do things that would scare them off. And nothing would scare them more than taking up the class struggle. Any alliance with bosses is one dominated politically by bosses.

In the North such a strategy does nothing to take our class out of the dead end of communal politics. The Sinn Féin statement after the Adams/Hume talks in January described the meeting as "part of a quest for common interests between nationalist parties". To hell with any idea of workers unity and socialism if some sort of pan Catholic unity can be forged with the representatives of disgruntled Catholic professionals and gombeen shopkeepers.

Of course many in Sinn Féin don't see it that way. They want to put the SDLP to the test, to show that they won't live up to their promises. Has that not been done on many occasions over the years, most notably during the Hunger Strike? And anyway it means having to argue on the SDLP's terms, which are neither working class nor socialist.

Protestants

Quite amazingly the one million Protestants in the six counties hardly figure in Sinn Féin's policies or literature. There is no attempt to split them away from their loyalist ideas and leaders. In republican eyes there can be no common interest between Catholic and Protestant workers until the border has been got rid of. In their words: "partition makes normal class struggle impossible":

This means they have to downplay the importance of, or completely ignore, events like the 1907 Belfast dock strike which saw tens of thousands of Catholic and Protestant workers fighting together for trade union rights. This strike had such a deep impact on workers of both religions that even the police came out on strike. In 1919 when the mainly Protestant shipbuilding and engineering workers struck for a reduction in hours they elected a strike committee with a Catholic majority. In 1932 the unemployed of the Falls and Shankill fought side by side against the police. In 1984 the health workers strike over wages and cuts involved workers of both religions in a very united struggle. Only two years ago we saw mainly Protestant DHSS staff strike when their Catholic co-workers were subjected to loyalist death threats.

To recognise the importance of these momentous events does not mean that we blind ourselves to the reality of sectarianism. Each time the workers unity was shattered and sometimes followed by Orange pogroms. But it does demonstrate very clearly that there is no "Iron Law" stopping workers' unity on class issues in the here and now.

It is wrong to dismiss Protestant workers as some sort of "labour aristocracy". The facts just don't bear out this idea. They do suffer proportionally less unemployment, they have better

access to skilled work. The bosses have always thrown them a few crumbs in order to make them believe that they have more in common with Protestant bosses than with Catholic fellow workers. But the privileges they have are only marginal, Protestant workers are also in badly paid jobs and also end up on the dole. The reality of Orange bigotry is one of 3p looking down on 2p.

Redividing Poverty?

One problem with the republicans' stages theory is that it cannot appeal to the Protestant working class. If the next step is a fight for a united capitalist Ireland there can be no concerted challenge to the existing economic set-up in the 26 counties. Instead it is to be extended to all 32 counties. So all that would be on offer is a fairer distribution of unemployment and low paid jobs. Hardly the sort of thing that will appeal to them, no matter how many times the memory of Wolfe Tone is invoked!

There is an alternative. An appeal to Protestant workers on the basis of their class interests, a fight for more of the good things of life instead of one to redivide the few crumbs thrown from the bosses' table. It is not easy and it would be extremely irresponsible to pretend it won't be a hard uphill struggle. But there is no good reason why it can't be done. The starting point is where workers can be united in action around "bread and butter" issues. This means paying great attention to the struggles of rank and file trade unionists. We don't have to sacrifice our anti imperialism but we do have to reject "Irish Ireland nationalism". Our anti imperialism has to be rooted in the class struggle, we are against partition because it divides workers and helps to sustain the rule of the bosses.

Sin Féin don't even consider such a possibility. In Gerry Adams book he gives a mere 14 lines to an analysis of the unions. The republicans' alternative is a combination of armed struggle, community campaigns and getting their politicians into the parliamentary and council chambers.

South of the Border

The Provos have no strategy for breaking the Protestant working class away from loyalty to Orange and British bosses. And, if we are honest about it, this has proved to be the major obstacle in the way of uniting the country. The consequences of forcing them into a green nationalist Ireland are a far higher price than we are prepared to pay.

The biggest incentive for Protestant workers' attitudes to change would be an active socialist movement in the South. A movement that is against the border because we want to replace both states with a workers republic, a movement taking on loyalist bigotry and taking on the power of the Catholic church. A movement that shows by its actions that it is committed to a better life for all working class people. This cannot be built within the confines of nationalism, the struggle for workers' liberty and socialism cannot be put on the long finger.

The Meaning of Socialism

So is the task to try to convince republicans to adopt new and better tactics? That would not be facing up to a greater and more vital question. That question is "what sort of Ireland do we

want?” Most, if not all members of Sinn Féin regard themselves as socialists. They make no bones about it. The problem is that their vision of “socialism” is based on the Cuban/Russian model, which has shown itself time after time to be just as repressive as Western style capitalism. They draw inspiration from third world “National Liberation Movements”, which once they have won power have shown no mercy in oppressing their own workers.

Gerry Adams, in his book, describes his concept of socialism as “a definite form of society in which the main means of production, distribution and exchange are socially owned and controlled and in which production is based on human need rather than private profit” He does not say who will “socially own and control” whether it will be the state with new rulers in charge or whether it will be workers’ councils.

We do get some indication of his thinking when he explains how it will happen. “You must have your own national government with the power to institute the political and economic changes which constitute socialism” So he is talking about us being governed, though with the governing party having the best motives. He is not talking about the working class taking control of its own destiny, of workers councils, of grassroots democracy, of the greatest possible amount of personal freedom. Instead the Sinn Féin popular government will have the final say about what we can have and how society will be organised, and they will grant the reforms and make the rules from above. The reforms granted would probably add up to little more than nationalisation plus some progressive social legislation.

Sinn Féin Policy

Last year’s Ard Fheis was described as “a milestone in the development of Sinn Féin as a progressive revolutionary party” A resolution from the Letterkenny Cumann called for a rank and file movement of trade unionists and unemployed people “committed to united action and co-ordination of all forms of resistance to the plight faced by workers at the present time” It was decisively rejected. Rank and File is independent of the union full-time officials, it is about control of struggles by the union members involved in them. Most in Sinn Féin, while being opposed to many individual union bureaucrats, want to uphold the authority of the position. Some day they hope their party will hold of these positions and use them to “lead the workers”. The concept of workers’ self-activity does not sit well with their view of “socialism”.

Much more revealing in terms of what they think socialism is about was the debate on Polish Solidarnosc. The party leadership backed the move to throw out their previous support for the free trade union. The motion was carried by a massive majority and it was very open about changing their position from supporting Solidarnosc to supporting “the struggle of the Polish people to defend national independence and socialism against the attacks of internal anti-socialist and external counter-revolutionary elements” Anarchists have many criticisms of Solidarnosc’s ideas and views but we know what side we are on in any fight between ten million trade unionists and a boss class. Sinn Féin now regard the rulers of the Russian client state as “socialist” and the working class as “anti-socialist”. If state capitalism, and that is the true nature of the system in Poland, can be thought of as socialism it says a lot about the limited vision of the republicans.

Back to Basics

It is correct to see Sinn Féin as part of the “left” in so far as we are describing the broad movement of genuine anti-capitalists. It is quite wrong to think that differences within the left are only about tactics. Before we even talk about tactics we should first make sure that we are fighting for the same thing. The word “socialism” is not enough, we have to say what it means. We have to clarify what we are talking about; who will run society, how will it be run, how important is the freedom of the individual, how do we see those countries that claim to be socialist?

Even with the best will in the world, Sinn Féin’s politics will lead them down the road to authoritarian state capitalism. We will continue to do what we can in defence of republicans against the State, We will continue to work alongside them on particular issues where we are in broad agreement. But we also want to re-open a debate that has been ignored for far too long, the debate about the meaning of socialism.

ANGLO-IRISH DEAL...THE ANARCHIST ALTERNATIVE

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Fitzgerald and Thatcher are trying to sell the Anglo-Irish deal to their supporters. The SDLP are joining in along with Labour and the Workers Party. Hours of TV time and acres of newsprint have been devoted to their efforts. Foreign leaders from Reagan to Mitterand have pledged their support.

One question nobody bothered to ask was is the deal will have anything to offer the working class. Northern, Southern, Catholic, Protestant or Atheist the answer is a definite NO.

It is very tempting to shrug it all off except that a product of the deal may well be a renewed campaign of bloody sectarian assassinations. Already the UVF and the UDA (through its UFF cover name) have threatened just this.

The only real policy change that is coming is the proposal for giving the Dublin government a consultative role. There is a general impression put about that they will protect the rights of the minority. Since when has the gang in Leinster House cared about civil rights?

Civil Rights

What is there to choose between the juryless Special Criminal Court in the South and the juryless Diplock courts in the North? When the torturers in Castlereagh were running wild in the mid 70's the "Heavy Gang" was rampaging through the South.

The Dublin government has only this year allowed even restricted access to contraception. They are stalling on a referendum to allow divorce. They allow the Catholic church an almost total monopoly on the education system yet finance it out of taxpayers' money.

Honesty"

What has really come out of the talks is small portion of honesty. Its a small one but, and this is rare for a gathering of politicians, it is there if you look behind the actual words of the agreement. For the first time a Dublin government has openly said it has no problem in recognising Britain's 'right' to control the North. On the other side Thatcher has finally said what most of the British ruling class have quietly agreed since the turn of the century, that whether they stay or pull out will not be governed by anything the loyalists want.

That does not mean they are getting ready to leave. Both governments are agreed there will be no move towards unity except in a situation of stability. They don't want their investments

and profits getting upset. Stability means an orderly transfer of power to Dublin without either a loyalist backlash or the Provos trying to push things further than intended.

Nationalism

We stand for a United Ireland. Not just getting rid of the border or changing the cap badges of the cops but a united country with a united working class running it. We have nothing in common with nationalism which appeals to our “Irishness” and speaks in almost mystical terms of the “Gaels”.

We are totally opposed to the capitalist set-up in the South. We have no interest in merely extending it into the six counties. And under no circumstances would we support the coercion of one million Protestants into a rotten state they want no part of. The United Ireland we propose is very different; one that can win their support a Workers Republic.

The task ahead of us is clear. The republicans will come under increasing repression on both sides of the border. This has to be combated. Despite all their errors, the Provos are not the problem. They are a response to generations of injustice and as anti-imperialists we point to the British occupation and upholding of the sectarian statelet as the real problem.

Although we stand uncompromisingly for getting rid of the border we are not part of any pan-nationalist movement. Our enemy is not just the British ruling class and their friends in the Dail. We are against all bosses and rulers. Our opposition to partition has nothing to do with wanting to paint the post boxes green or changing the colour of the flag over Stormont. It has to do with the divisions imposed on our class. This has only been of benefit to the bosses; there has never been anything in it for the rest of us.

Bigotry

Loyalist bigotry can be broken but only if Protestant workers are split from the ideas of hate mongers like Paisley, McCusker and Seawright. This will start only when a positive alternative can be pointed to. Fights in the South for higher pay, more jobs, divorce rights and an end to church domination of education are the way to begin this.

By fighting now for better conditions and linking it to the fight for a United Workers Republic we pose the alternative to the Orange and Green Tories. The Ireland we want will be secular and socialist. It will be based on the mass democracy of workers and community councils, and will guarantee equality and freedom for all.

WHEN THE RED FLAG FLEW IN MUNSTER

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Irish Workers taking over their jobs, flying the Red Flag and declaring for socialism? “It never happened here”. That’s what the establishment historians want you to think, that is why they have written whole episodes of our history out of the schoolbooks. In reality thousands of workers were involved in just such action at the beginning of the 1920’s.

In the time from the Easter rising to the War of Independence the unions began to recover from the defeat of the 1913 lockout. Membership rose from 120,000 to 319,000, which was half of all wage earners. The ITGWU grew from 5,000 to 120,000.

The Russian revolution inspired workers in the years before its defeat at the hands of the new ruling class. In 1917 10,000 marched in Dublin and the Irish Citizen Army stated with great foresight that the lesson of Russia was that “the state must be destroyed and industrial control by workers established”.

Limerick

In 1918 the Anti-conscription strike was won and the following year 40,000 Belfast engineering workers came out for a 44-hour week. That year also saw the Limerick Soviet. In response to the British army declaring martial law and denying travel permits to workers who lived outside the city the United Trades and Labour Council organised a general strike and seized control of the city. The trades council took over printing presses to explain their case, regulated food prices to stop profiteering, issued their own money and provided staff for essential services. Nothing moved without a permit from the council. This lasted for 14 days.

Motor Permits Strike

That winter also saw a national strike by lorry drivers against having to get permits from the British army. It was won with massive support from all over the country. All this set the scene for what would become known as the “Munster Soviets”.

Cleeves

The Cleeve family owned mills, bakeries, agriculture machinery works, the Limerick Chronicle and 14 creameries throughout Munster. Their 3,000 employees had no union and earned one of the lowest wages in Ireland, 85p a week. The Cleeve family were millionaires. In 1919 the workers joined the ITGWU and its affiliated clerical union. They set up a Council of Action and prepared to strike for higher wages.

Knocklong

Cleeves were clever to split the union by offering different rises to each job. However, even when Knocklong creamery were left out on their own they still succeeded in winning a wage of £1.95-£2.10 after a campaign of spilling scab milk into ditches.

The following year the local union secretary, Sean O'Dwyer, who was a creamery worker, drew up plans to bring the company to its knees by occupying the creamery and its 12 subsidiary depots. Before taking over, the workers at the local co-op creamery were visited and they agreed not to take the milk of Cleeves' usual suppliers. This meant the farmers could be made an offer they couldn't refuse: to send their milk to the Soviet creamery or throw it away.

Occupation

On the second Saturday of May the strike began. The next morning the strikers took over. The Red Flag was hoisted and the company's nameplate removed. In its place was put a sign Knocklong Soviet Creamery and above this We make butter not profits. All the depots were occupied as well. The much hated manager, Riordan, was ordered out and a new manager elected from the ranks of the union members.

97% of the usual milk went to the creamery. Two tons of butter were made each day, and all the orders filled, including those of Belfast. The workers were making a better job of running things and the bosses broke down. They contacted the Soviet Creamery where the workers gave them a list of demands including more pay, less hours, more holidays, the permanent sacking of Riordan and no victimisation. After just 11 hours Cleeves conceded these terms. On being given back the creamery their first act was to paint out the Soviet sign... with green paint!

This victory led other Cleeves staff to occupy and they too won demands in Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir and Limerick. The least successful fight was in Tipperary where the women occupiers found it impossible to get supplies or markets. But even there they got half the wage rise they were looking for.

IRA Aided Bosses

A wave of occupations, mainly in Munster, then occurred. The Co Wexford Farmers Association warned of "Red Flag Terrorist Agitators". Over 400 landlords were dispossessed by agricultural labourers until the IRA came to the aid of the gentry by having the republican land courts order an end to "illegal seizures".

Indeed this was not an isolated incident. The IRA was used to smash a farm strike in Bulgaden and to evict a Soviet occupation from the mills at Quarterstown. Countess Markievicz warned of the "imminence of social revolution". Her friends in the Dáil decided "All this is a grave menace to the Republic. The mind of the people is being diverted from the struggle for freedom by a class war". Seemingly the republican idea of freedom did not include freedom from the exploitation of the boss.

Wave of Occupations

In 1921 and 1922 similar Soviet occupations occurred at mills and creameries in at least 15 other locations, at Cork Harbour, North Cork railways, the quarry and the fishing boats at Castleconnell, a coach builders in Tipperary as well as the local gas works, a clothing factory in Dublin's Rathmines, sawmills in Killarney and Ballinacourtie, the Drogheda Iron Foundry, Waterford Gas, mines at Arigna and Ballingarry. Undoubtedly there were others.

Successes

Most were successful as methods of getting the bosses to pay wage claims but they were more than just disputes about pay. They reflected both the growing confidence of newly unionised workers and a political idealism that looked to an Ireland free not only of the British army but also free of native bosses. They called their occupations Soviets because they were impressed by the example of the Russian workers who had established their own councils, called Soviets, to run that country.

It could have led to great social change but instead it petered out. When the Irish Women Workers Union (now a section of the FWUI) called on the union leaders to extend the occupations not one of them paid any heed. Where they were not opposed they certainly were not supportive. Like today's full-time officials they preferred to operate through the proper channels rather than challenge the bosses' authority.

The missing factor was a revolutionary anarchist organisation that could have built links between the different groups of workers who were in struggle, put forward the ideas of anarchism and developed a strategy for linking the anti-imperialist and class struggles to bring about a truly free Ireland run by the working class through their own democratic councils.

1916: WHAT ARE YOU COMMEMORATING?

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This year marks the 70th Anniversary of the Easter Rising. There will be all kinds of commemorations- with every major party claiming to be the true inheritors of the spirit of 1916. Sinn Féin and even the Workers Party will be out commemorating this heroic event.

It was heroic. Some would even say stupid. The rising itself had little popular support. Most Irish people at the time believed that Irish men should be off fighting the Germans. It was widely thought that in return Home Rule would finally become a reality. The leaders of the rising were not too worried about this. They believed the blood sacrifice was all that was needed to inspire future generations.

Nationalists

The Rising itself was led by middle-class nationalists. Their one and only objective was the liberation of the country from British rule. This has not yet been achieved. Indeed all the major parties, including the Workers Party, have given up on this. The Anglo Irish deal is only the latest attempt to come to terms with partition. But for all the waffle about being the true inheritors of the Rising not one government of the Free State has implemented the limited demands of the rebels.

The Proclamation declared the following “The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities for all its citizens and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally”.

Equality

Here we see a general liberal desire for equality. But far from equality all we see around us in the Irish Republic is inequality. Workers are thrown on the dole and expected to live on a pittance while the bosses make enormous profits and eat in 2 outrageously expensive restaurants. There are plush new private hospitals while

workers get second rate health care. Women are denied the right to participate fully in society. Their role as wives and child-minders is enshrined in the Constitution.

Far from cherishing all children equally the state still labels children born outside marriage as illegitimate. Working class children are denied the right to attend 3rd level education yet their parents fork out a fortune in taxes to subsidise the children of the rich.

Not that the leaders of the Rising were socialist or anything like it. Their only concern was to get the British out. The new Ireland was clearly going to be capitalist. The proclamation calls on all Irish people to unite saying that all previous differences which “have divided a minority from

the majority” were “carefully fostered by an alien government. So the only problem was British domination.

It obviously was a problem but this perspective totally overlooks the fact that only three years previously the Irish bosses led by William Martin Murphy had locked out and starved thousands of Irish workers. Were the workers now to forget all this and unite with their enemies.

The presence of Connolly did not give the rising a socialist tinge. Connolly had clearly decided that socialism should be put in cold storage. He believed that the World War was a great opportunity to strike at Britain. Also the defeat in the Lockout had left the working class demoralised. Rather than get stuck in and rebuild union organisation and militancy Connolly chose to go with the nationalists. He was not fighting for socialism when he went into the GPO.

Executions

The executions following the Rising (rather than the Rising Itself) and the British attempts to introduce conscription set the country alight. British rule was totally undermined by 1919. The War of Independence and the first Dáil not only showed that the majority of people now opposed the British, but also highlighted what Sinn Féin was fighting for.

In many parts of the country land was seized and “Soviets” were established in many workplaces. These workers wanted more than a united capitalist Ireland. They wanted the whole set-up changed. They wanted real control over their lives. But this did not fit into the policy of uniting all Irish people, Sinn Féin land courts were established and the land was handed back to its former owners. The Countess Markiewicz, one of the heroines of the Rising, warned against the “harbingers of social revolution”.

Workers Republic

Today Sinn Féin claim, louder than anybody, to be the inheritors of 1916. Without a doubt they are. They carry on the tradition of the armed struggle and the blood sacrifice. Despite all the left wing posturing they are still nationalists whose aim is to unite all Irish people against the British. As in 1916 there are not just “Irish people”. There are Irish workers and Irish bosses and they have nothing in common.

The task remains to free the country from British domination. For Anarchists this can only be done by taking up the struggle as part of the fight for a Workers Republic. Workers’ control and the smashing of capitalism is our aim. Anything less is not worth fighting for. The real heroes/heroines of Irish history are the workers who fought for this. The state will not hold commemorations for these. That might only encourage workers today.

MURDER GANG TARGETS CATHOLICS

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Since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement over six months ago, Loyalist gangs have been going on the rampage throughout the North once again. In their wake they have left sectarian murders, massive intimidation of Catholics at home and in work, and an increased air of sectarianism and tension throughout the six counties. It is working class Catholics who are once again the main losers — the current sectarian wave being reminiscent of the mid-seventies when Loyalist violence was rampant.

To go by the newspapers you would almost believe that it was the other way around — that it was Loyalists who were being terrorised. Media attention has constantly been focused on the attacks on the RUC since good old fashioned pillage of Catholic homes is hardly anything new. Likewise, people such as George Seawright and Ian Paisley have made much of their claim that Ulster is under siege from the “Papists”.

Historic?

The claim of course is ludicrous. The Anglo-Irish Deal coming as it does from the likes of Thatcher and Fitzgerald is anything but a threat to Loyalist supremacy. As it stands it says nothing about the social and economic discrimination that is the basis of the Orange State in the six counties. The poorer housing and amenities that Catholics suffer compared with their Protestant counterparts, is not to change at all. For all its “historic” dimensions the Deal is nothing but the same old story for Northern Catholics.

Diplock

What was new in the Agreement was the open involvement of the Irish Government in a new security arrangement aimed at defeating the IRA. Unlike in the past, cross Border security and co-operation between the Gardaí would now be regularly

discussed and reviewed at joint London-Dublin meetings with a view to making the repression of the Provos and Sinn Féin more effective. In return, for this open involvement in defeating the Republicans, the Dublin Government was to be given an opportunity to raise ‘issues’ of ‘concern’ to the Catholic community with a view to reforming them if the ‘security’ situation would allow it. This latter concession was pure window dressing. For instance Peter Barry recently raised the question of the ‘unsightly’ Diplock Courts, but was flatly told that until a better way of putting Republicans behind bars was found, they would just have to stay! Is this the ‘Papist siege’ that Paisley is so afraid of?

Backlash

The response of the Loyalists has taken Thatcher and Fitzgerald by surprise. Despite their reassurances that the Orange State would be maintained as long 'as the majority wanted it', there has been a huge mobilisation of Protestants against the Agreement. This mobilisation has not been fully supported by all Protestant leaders. Moderates in the OUP, Alliance and some dergy recognise that the Anglo-Irish Deal could have advantages, not just from the point of view of defeating the Provos, but also because of the potential investment from the EEC and the United States. But by and large these moderates have been pulled along in the tide of sectarianism initiated by the likes of Seawright, Peter Robinson of the DUP and Alan Wright of the Ulster Clubs. It is from these that the real menace comes.

Bigots

Like any bigots, the arguments of Paisley, Seawright and Co. don't deserve a shred of reasonable comment. They are, after all, only intent on one thing – stirring up sectarianism. What is important is the economic conditions that give their hatred and bigotry a fertile breeding ground.

Marginal

It is here that the key lies. While Protestant workers have marginally better conditions in the six counties than Catholics, their position is still a poor one. Wages and employment have particularly suffered in the current recession. Apart from Catholics, Protestant workers have the lowest wages and the worst housing compared to any other large group of workers in the IJK. And it's getting worse.

Threat

This has meant frustration and disillusionment which potentially could be a threat to the Orange state. The solution for the more extreme of the loyalists is to stir up sectarian conflict and channel the disillusionment away from the economic system that creates it. Instead it is channelled against other workers who can be easily singled out and scapegoated – Catholics.

Real Enemy

The current spate of sectarian violence shows once again the real role of loyalism. It divides workers, turning them against each other, while the real enemy – the boss class – gets off scot free. The ruling class in the six counties have always used sectarianism as a weapon in the class struggle. Perhaps no better example of its detrimental force was when it split the unemployed Catholics and Protestants who had come together in 1932 in the Outdoor Relief Strike against the poverty and misery of the Orange State.

Sectarianism can be defeated but it will take the force of the working class in the South as well as the North to provide an alternative that is worth looking to. There can be no lasting internal solution in the six counties. Imperialism and the divisions it causes in our class is part and parcel

of capitalism. Workers in the 26 counties suffer under the same system where society is divided into rich and poor, order givers and order takers. By taking up the fight against this rotten set-up they can offer another option beyond the choice of "Orange or Green". The struggle to get rid of exploitation and put in its place a free Workers Republic without bosses or bureaucrats will inevitably lay the basis for winning significant sections of Protestant workers away from Loyalism and into the struggle for socialism. It is by this alone that sectarianism will be defeated and the back of Loyalism broken once and for all.

WORKERS STRIKE AGAINST THE BIGOTS

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It is like the mid-70's again in the Catholic areas of the six counties. People don't answer a knock on their door without first shouting out to see who is there. The death squads of the UDA and UVF are stalking the streets.

On August 7th DUP deputy leader Peter Robinson led a gang of thugs over the border into Clontibret. While the media concentrated on this stunt, it went almost unreported that 500 loyalists had sealed off and taken over the Co. Derry village of Swatragh on the same night. This is a mainly Catholic village and the loyalists, some of whom were said to be armed, did it to show they are capable of dealing with large numbers of Catholics whenever they feel like it.

Murdered

On the same day, death threats were also issued to Catholics working in Protestant or mixed areas. These threats came from the UFF, and it is no secret that this is just a cover name for the UDA. These are not idle threats. Workers have been murdered, most recently a young builders labourer and a taxi driver in Belfast. 30

The increased climate of bigotry has already seen incidents like the murder of seven Catholics in North Belfast over the last six months, the driving of over 100 Catholics out of Lisburn, the attacks on the Co. Antrim village of Rasharkin. We could easily fill this paper by just listing all the murders, attempted murders, beatings, petrol bombings and intimidation that occurred over the summer.

Divide and Rule

Loyalist leaders always whip up sectarian hatred whenever they feel that Catholics may be gaining any small improvement in their lot. Above all else they have to keep the workers divided on religious lines if they are to hang on to their power, prestige and wealth. Though, it will come as news to most working class Catholics that they will stand to gain anything much from the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It is a deal worked out solely for the benefit of the ruling classes of Dublin and London.

This need to keep working people divided explains why the town of Lisburn has been picked by the UDA. There are no large ghettos, most streets are mixed and that is what the bigots are out to end. The Catholics are to be driven out and forced into West Belfast and Poleglass. This is also why some of the most vicious attacks have been directed against couples in mixed marriages, and so-called "rotten-Pros" i.e. Protestants who are anti-sectarian and left wing.

Strikes

The middle of August, however, saw the exact opposite of what the UDA had hoped for. Direct threats had been made to DHSS, health board and housing offices that Catholic workers in them were going to be killed. The response was fantastic. In Lisburn all 124 DHSS workers immediately walked out in solidarity with their threatened workmates. Catholics, Protestants and those of no religion stood together as workers. The next day 2,000 workers in another 12 offices joined in and the following morning 14 offices were shut. Without any lead from their national officials, local activists of the union (NIPSA) had organised the strikes and had found that nearly all staff were eager to stand up to the hate-mongers. Action took place in Housing Executive Offices and in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board.

Let us be quite clear that while most of the sectarian intimidation is coming from the loyalist side, nationalists have not been blameless. Four Protestant binmen were ordered off the Poleglass estate by a gang wielding hurley sticks (their fellow workers correctly decided to black all bin collections on the estate until this thuggery stopped). In Armagh last month there was talk of a 'Catholic Reaction Force' to engage in retaliation against innocent Protestants. This sort of thing has happened before and is no more an idle threat than are the spoutings of the UDA. We can all remember the massacre of Protestant churchgoers at Darkley.

History

Because of an accident of history most Northern Protestants identify with loyalism and most Northern Catholics with nationalism but let us be quite clear that this is not a religious war. And it is not by appealing to vague ideals of 'Christianity' or 'tolerance' that sectarianism will be cast into the gutter where it belongs. The problem is political. The six county state was set up because it was in the economic interest of the bosses whose industries were linked to those of Liverpool and Glasgow. It was set up to avoid tariff barriers being placed in the way of their free trade.

The workers were to be kept divided, and thus they were to be kept as cheap labour by playing on their religious differences and forcing them into all-class alliances with their bosses on both sides of the divide. The very basis of the six county state is sectarian and that is why it has proved impossible to reform in any meaningful way. That is why, even with the best will in the world, the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU are wasting their time if they believe that re-launching their 'Better life for All' campaign can break the hold of the bigots.

Uproot

We will support any action taken by workers against sectarianism. We see such action as a great step forward. But we also recognise that to finally uproot the problem we have to talk in terms of smashing the six-county state.

To offer a nationalist united Ireland, whether of a Fianna Fail or a Sinn Féin type, gives Protestant workers no reason to break from the Orange bosses. We offer an alternative. Our goal is an Ireland which is socialist, where the freedom of the individual is respected and where the working class hold direct and complete control through their own councils. Our goal is a united Workers Republic.

WHEN THE FALLS AND THE SHANKILL FOUGHT TOGETHER

Published in Workers Solidarity no. 21, October 1986.

The Falls and the Shankill united, Catholics and Protestants fighting together. That is the story of the Outdoor Relief Strike launched by the unemployed of Belfast in 1932. It is important today not only because it is a part of our history that has been denied space in the school books but also because it was a living demonstration that the sectarian barrier can be breached.

The Wall Street crash had hit the industrialised countries hard. Northern Ireland was hit harder than most. Its two principal industries, textiles and shipbuilding, took a hammering. Because the crisis was world wide the Stormont government could not continue to export the unemployed. Up to 1931 10,000 a year had been sailing abroad in search of work. Now there were no jobs anywhere and both Canada and the 32

USA started to give 'one-way' tickets home to recent immigrants who had not become citizens.

Poor Laws

The Poor Laws had been scrapped in the South in 1924 and in Britain in 1928 but Stormont kept them in operation. This gave the jobless a very raw deal and their numbers were rapidly growing. Out of one and a quarter million people over a hundred thousand had seen their jobs disappear. Of these 42,710 were getting benefit, 19,380 were on transitional benefit (which was reviewed every three months) and 13,908 got no money at all. A further 24,000, mainly women and young workers, were not even officially registered. And several thousand others had their benefit reduced or stopped by the operation of the 'means test'.

As the 'means test' increased the number of unemployed not getting any money from the Labour Exchange, there was an increase in the number applying to the Board of Guardians for 'outdoor relief'. These schemes employed married men at tasks like road repairs for a wage of between eight and twenty four shillings (40p-£1.20) depending on the number of children the man had. To get onto this scheme a man had to submit to a rigorous investigation of his circumstances. Such task work generally lasted six months with one to three days work a week. At the time of the strike about 2,000 were employed on ODR.

Poverty

A survey of conditions showed that 37% of working class families in Belfast were living in absolute poverty. This meant such a lack of food, clothing or fuel as to endanger health. Tuberculosis killed off 45% of all those who died between the ages of 15 and 25 and 38% of those between 25 and 35. A quarter of all children dying under the age of one died in the workhouse (1932-1934).

The government at Stormont couldn't care less about the plight of the unemployed, their only worry was that it might provoke unrest but they didn't consider that an immediate threat. Indeed the government had been in recess since May and only met briefly in September to pass a vote extending its holiday till November.

Organising

Everywhere the unemployed were organising. In the South the Irish Unemployed Workers Movement was holding large demonstrations, at one meeting in Longford in October 1,000 turned up to hear speakers from the Movement (including Jim Gralton the only Irishman ever to be deported by a Dublin government). In Britain the Hunger Marches were taking place alongside disruptions of political banquets and invasions of factories to appeal for an end to overtime and speed-ups. Against this background the Revolutionary Workers Groups had become active. While the RWG's went on to form the Communist Party of Ireland it must be remembered that Stalin's crimes were not widely known then and that it was the only socialist organisation of note that was active.

They set about arguing for a fighting response to the dole queue and won a certain respect from the unemployed. An Outdoor Relief Workers Committee was set up and shortly after Tommy Geehan of the RWG, who was also a delegate to the Belfast Trades Council, called for a strike by the ODR workers.

Demands

Almost all the 2,000 relief workers turned up to a mass meeting on September 30th and voted to strike in four days time if these demands were not met:

- * Abolition of task work.
- * Increase in relief payments to: Man 15s 3d per week, wife 8s and 2s for each child.
- * No payment in "kind" — all payments to be in cash.
- * Street improvement work and other such schemes to be paid at trade union rates.
- * Adequate outdoor allowances for all single unemployed men and women who are not in receipt of unemployment benefit.

Needless to say their demands were not conceded. On Monday October 3rd the strike began and was 100% solid. That evening a crowd of 30,000 marched from Frederick Street Labour Exchange to the Custom House steps where a mass meeting was held. This was the first time since 1919 that workers had ignored the bigots and united on class lines to fight for their own interests. Catholic and Protestant made common cause against the ruling class.

Workhouse

The next morning 7,000 marched to the Lisburn Road workhouse where the Board of Guardians usually met. The road, one of the main routes into the city, was blocked for three hours. A

delegation was received by the Guardians (after threats of what would happen if they refused) but nothing was got from them other than a letter to the government asking them to provide more relief.

On Wednesday October 5th the RUC prevented another march to the workhouse by lining the route with Crossly tenders and Lancia armoured cars. Nevertheless demonstrators got past the police lines and 144 were admitted to the workhouse as inmates. Once inside they refused to obey orders and were reported singing and dancing throughout the night. Three were arrested and removed from the building. Two were released after giving an undertaking not to repeat their behaviour. The third refused and went to jail for a month.

Rioting

That night rioting broke out in several places. A tram was hijacked and dozens of shops were looted in the main Catholic and Protestant areas. The RUC baton i charged the crowds as soon as they formed. The rioting continued for the rest of the week.

The local ruling class and Unionist establishment suddenly realised the seriousness of what was happening. They had nothing against rioting, they had organised many anti-Catholic pogroms themselves. What was occurring on the streets was very different, it was the one thing they feared – working class unity.

On Monday 10th the Lord Mayor, Sir Crawford McCullagh took representatives of the Guardians into his parlour in City Hall to try to come up with concessions that could kill the influence of the ODR Strike Committee. The night before McCullagh had been visited by leading businessmen who urged him to do something quickly.

Rent Strike

The offer put to the strikers was for more relief work plus extra pay for extra time worked. At a mass meeting in St Mary's Hall the strikers turned this down. They wanted full trade union rates of pay for all work done and an increased rate on the ODR schemes.

A rent strike was called, bonfires lit in working class districts and thousands were addressed by speakers from the strike committee. The city became like an armed camp with thousands of police being called in. Tensions were running very high. A special mass meeting of women was also held in St Mary's Hall where they pledged to stand shoulder to shoulder with their men-folk in the coming fight.

A huge demonstration was called for the following day (Tuesday 11th). The government banned it under the notorious Special Powers Act and put the Royal Enniskillen Fusiliers on stand by. The RUC were issued with rifles as well as their usual revolvers. Tommy Geehan had predicted at the women's meeting the previous night that no ban would stop the demonstration. "For many years the workers of Belfast have been divided by artificial barriers of religion and politics, but the past two months have witnessed a wonderful spectacle, because the workers were united on a common platform demanding the right to live. Tomorrow you will see the mightiest demonstration of unity there has ever been in Belfast. The authorities have banned the demonstration but the workers are going out"

RUC Murders

And they did. Fighting broke out when police tried to disperse the workers. Armoured cars were called in and the strikers went to the ODR sites to get their tools. These tools now became weapons. Fierce hand to hand battles took place on the Falls and the Shankill, with the RUC bringing their guns into play. Sammy Baxter, a Protestant from Regent Street who had been fighting alongside his Catholic fellow strikers, was shot dead on the Falls. The people responded by building barricades to keep the police out and repulse their attacks. That night a police curfew was enforced for the first time since 1922.

The following day saw the fighting continue with John Keenan, a Catholic from the Falls Road, being killed by the RUC. James Kelly of the Irish Independent described one scene: “On the Shankill Road crowds of growling men lounged around waiting... Suddenly a big red faced woman with a black shawl thrown over her shoulders, wisps of hair hanging from her eyes, appeared almost from nowhere... She ran to crowds of men and in quick, terse language told them that the unemployed and the police were in conflict on the Falls Road “Are you going to let them down ? “ she almost shrieked. “No, by heavens we are not’: they roared back, and in almost a twinkling a veritable orgy of destruction began”.

Mill Workers

Everywhere the police with their guns and armoured cars went they were let by stone throwers. Each time they tried to get into the side streets the stone throwers drove them back onto the main roads. On the Falls Road the mill workers, many in bare feet, came out and smashed up the police cordons trying to prevent the food parcels sent by the unions getting into the beleaguered north and west of the city.

The government had finally come up with a strategy. John Campbell, secretary of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, commented “Lord Craigavon’s solution was to divide the workers into different religious camps and it was noteworthy that although the recent trouble was spread all over the city only in a Roman Catholic area did the police use their guns”.

Sir Dawson Bates, Stormont Minister for Home Affairs, claimed the IRA were using the ODR strike as a cover to overthrow “Protestant rights”. Nothing like the threat of an IRA uprising to reactivate the sectarian monster.

Deaths

When the rioting stopped two were dead and another fifteen had suffered gunshot wounds – all in Catholic areas and inflicted by the RUC. Nineteen others, nearly all Protestant, had suffered other serious injuries mainly caused by batons.

The government was working hard to break the new-found workers unity and had some success in rekindling religious hatred but they also had to compromise. The Belfast Trades Council threatened a general strike (although it is very questionable if its leaders would in fact have carried out this threat). Unionist officials hurried to negotiate with the Trades Council leaders.

The strikers won big cash increases in their relief pay. The terms were communicated to the strike committee by a delegation from the trades council. At a mass meeting in St Mary’s hall

Tommy Geehan proposed the terms be accepted. They were and there was much celebrating around the city.

Single Persons

One of the main demands, though, was not conceded, the giving of relief to single persons. Geehan and the other RWG members who were on the strike committee came in for heavy criticism for ending the strike before winning this. It was to have a very bad effect on the unemployed movement.

On October 17th left wing Labour Party members set up a breakaway organisation catering only for the single persons who had been left with nothing. And the next month the Trades Council set up a moderate organisation for the unemployed. With three competing organisations, whose leaderships spent most of their time attacking each other, the movement declined and the city grew quieter. 36

The Guardians felt confident enough by December to announce that the new agreed rates were maximum rates only and could be reduced as they decided! The new rates were paid to some, not to others and the single unemployed got nothing at all.

As the RWG were the driving force behind the unemployed movement we have to examine their record if we are to begin to understand what went wrong. They were undoubtedly the best fighters of their class at that time in Belfast but their politics were inevitably going to lead them into all sorts of stupidity.

Stalin

They were slavishly loyal to the Stalin regime in Moscow. In 1932 their current line was that everyone on the left outside the Communist Party is really what they called a 'social fascist'. And of course you are not going to work with someone you think is any kind of a 'fascist'. So the RWG's didn't involve themselves much in the trade unions. When the Trades Council leadership took control of the strike the RWG could do nothing about it as they had no base among ordinary trade unionists. And naturally it meant they could do little to put their plan for a general strike into operation. If such a strike had happened a truly outstanding victory would have been

Unionism

They seriously underestimated the strength of Unionism among Protestant workers. Some Protestant workers and unemployed did reject all the old carp and put their class interests first but most did not see a good reason for breaking from the politics they had been brought up with, the unity of the strike was based more on common suffering and poverty than anything else. It was fragile and indeed three years later there was a pogrom against Catholics and radical Protestants.

To deny the ruling class the chance of whipping up passions about the border it would have been necessary to promote an anti-imperialism that made no concessions to either Unionism or the Southern state. When the RWG was not ignoring the issue, they were calling for a united

capitalist Ireland as a first step. This offered nothing to Protestants. This is not to say that bigotry and ignorance can be broken overnight but the sooner the beginning is made the better.

“Leaders”

And very seriously, they did not do much to increase the self-confidence and political understanding of the unemployed. Instead they usually confined themselves to being “the leadership” of the strike and making emotional speeches denouncing capitalism. They didn’t see a need for anything other than a “leadership” with the unemployed falling in behind. The shouting of slogans, no matter how correct they are, is no substitute for winning people to revolutionary ideas and giving them the confidence to take on the task of changing society. However the most important thing about 1932 is that it was a great episode in the history of our class. For a short time the whole rotten all-class alliance of unionism was cracking. The theory that Protestant and Catholic workers would never unite was exposed as rubbish and the events of the strike provide an inspiration for those of us who see tackling sectarianism as a job that can’t be neglected. Let us learn from the mistakes but let us also learn what is possible when workers come together.

WORKERS' ACTION IS THE ANSWER

Published in Workers Solidarity no. 34, Spring 1992

THE KILLING of the seven building workers in January marks the most bloody episode in an IRA campaign against those who work for the 'security forces', a campaign which has been going on since 1985. There has been a massive wave of condemnation from bishops, politicians and media figures.

Most of it is hypocritical cant. In all wars people who assist or work for the enemy are targeted. During the War of Independence the 'old IRA' shot people it suspected of collaboration. Today it is a criminal offence to collaborate with the IRA. Anyone allowing them to use their house or car, anyone minding weapons or giving information can be sentenced to long terms in jail. In the North their name may be leaked to a loyalist death squad.

The Workers Solidarity Movement, as an anarchist and anti-imperialist organisation, agrees with the Provos that workers should not collaborate with the forces of imperialism. It is not in the interest of any worker to collaborate with imperialism, in Ireland or anywhere else.

This does not mean we agree with killing building workers. We don't. The IRA threats to workers who service or deliver to Army bases and RUC & UDR barracks tell us much about the Provos. For all their left-wing slogans, they remain an authoritarian nationalist movement. They decide what is good for us, they decide what methods to use. The role of everyone else is to passively cheer them on and preserve some sort of nationalist solidarity.

A genuinely socialist and revolutionary movement would have appealed to workers to black these bases because it is in their own interest to fight imperialism. It is undeniable that such an appeal would have been ignored by most. However in areas such as Newry, Derry and Strabane there was a very good chance that it would have been heeded if worked for. A campaign of this sort would consist of raising the issue within the unions, holding meetings at depot gates, producing leaflets, taking up the arguments and fighting for official union backing for anyone disciplined or sacked for refusing to help the state's war effort.

It would be a start in bringing workers — as workers — to the head of the anti imperialist struggle. It has been done before. At the time of the War of Independence there was an anti-conscription strike, the "Limerick Soviet", the refusal of train drivers to carry British troops or war materials.

Activity like this can give workers a sense of the potential power they possess. And by being based on the methods of mass struggle it can give workers the confidence to start getting involved in political activity themselves instead of leaving it to a few rulers and would-be rulers. This is very important if we are to build a real socialist society where there is no division into rulers and ruled.

We must also look at the objective result of the threats and killings. It does not matter a lot what the intentions of the Provos are, the fact is that killing labourers and other workers drives Protestants of our class further into the arms of bigots like Paisley. It is not enough to denounce such workers as supporters of imperialism the question is how to win them away from that.

Death threats certainly cannot do it. Whether we like it or not many Protestants believe that such workers are shot because they are Protestants and that the Provos' stated reasons are not the real ones. Therefore we call for the threats to be lifted and replaced by a workplace campaign based on arguments about working class self-interest.

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