

# WORKERS' LIBERTY

## no.5

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## Provos, Protestants and class politics: the debate on Ireland

### Background: chronology

**The 1960s: the South reopens its economy to the world market; Britain moves cautiously towards reforming the North.**

**1959** New foreign investment law in South gives big subsidies to investors. Start of an inflow of foreign capital.

**1965** January: Northern and Southern prime ministers meet. December: Anglo-Irish Free Trade agreement.

**1967** Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association formed.

**1968-72: The Catholic revolt explodes; the Northern Ireland state breaks down.**

**1968** October: Civil Rights march in Derry banned and attacked by police.

**1969** Constant conflict between police and Catholics. Battle of the Bogside to keep the police out of the Catholic area of Derry. Catholics burned out of their homes in Belfast. August: British Army takes control of the streets.

October: Catholics in Derry and Belfast take down their barricades. December 1969-January 1970: Republican movement splits into Official and Provisional wings.

**1970** July: Army curfew and house-to-house search in Catholic Lower Falls area of Belfast. August: Social Democratic and Labour Party formed.

**1971** August: Internment without trial introduced: 600 Catholics and radicals arrested. Big increase follows in Catholic alienation and armed activity by both Provisional and Official IRAs. September: Ulster Defence Association — a mass-based Protestant paramilitary group formed.

**1972** January: Bloody Sunday. 14 marchers on a peaceful Republican demonstration in Derry shot and killed by British Army. Barricades go up in Catholic areas of Derry and Belfast. March: Northern Ireland's home-rule Parliament abolished. 200,000 Protestant workers strike in protest. Previously monolithic Unionist Party breaks up over the following years.

**1972-6: Britain seeks a solution through reform but is beaten back by Protestant militancy.**

**1972** May: Official IRA ceasefire (which proves permanent). June: temporary Provisional IRA ceasefire. July: secret talks between Provisionals and British government. Late July: 'Bloody Friday' — nine killed by Provisional IRA bombs in centre of Belfast. Operation Motorman: army takes down Catholic barricades in Derry and Belfast.

**1973** December: Agreement drawn up by London and Dublin governments and Northern Ireland 'moderates' at Sunningdale for power-sharing in N. Ireland and a 'Council of Ireland'.

**1974** January: Power-sharing executive set up. February: Big victory for anti-power-sharing Unionists in Westminster election undermines Executive. May: General strike by Ulster Workers' Council brings down Executive.

November: Over 20 people killed by bombs in pubs in Birmingham. Provisionals condemn the bombing but say it was probably done by Provisional IRA Volunteers. British government rushes through Prevention of Terrorism Act

**1975** February to autumn: truce between Provos and British Army. May: New British initiative Constitutional Convention, supposed to design a new form of power-sharing. Dominated by Loyalists who will settle for nothing less than restored Protestant majority rule.

**1976** Convention shut down by British government.

**1976-82: Britain tries to hold the ring and 'sweat out' the Catholic revolt.**

**1976** March: 'Political status' withdrawn for Republican prisoners (it was introduced in 1972). In protest, prisoners refuse to wear prison uniform and wear blankets instead. 'Ulsterisation' policy: local forces strengthened. British Army presence reduced.

**1977** May: Paisley attempts Protestant strike for greater 'security' but it fails. British government found guilty of inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners by European Commission for Human Rights.

**1978** Prisoners refuse to have cells cleaned in 'dirty protest' against removal of political status.

**1979** Paisley tops the poll in Euro-election, and four Paisleyite (DUP) MPs elected to Westminster.

**1980** October: H Block prisoners go on hunger strike for political status. Strike called off at Christmas on basis of expected concessions.

**1981** March: Second hunger strike begins, led by Bobby Sands. April: Sands is elected MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. His agent, Owen Carron, is elected after Sands' death in May. Ten prisoners die before hunger strike ends in October.

**1982** Sinn Fein successes in local election. SDLP proposes 'Council for a New Ireland' with Southern Irish parties.

**1983-6: Sinn Fein consolidates its 'political' turn, and London and Dublin seek a new solution through reform from above.**

**1983** Gerry Adams elected as MP for West Belfast. SDLP attend the first meeting of the New Ireland Forum with Southern parties. In the South, abortion is made constitutionally illegal after a referendum.

**1984** May: New Ireland Forum produces a report with three options — a unitary Irish state, a federal Ireland, and 'joint (London-Dublin) authority' over the North. Forum report is supported by US and by British Labour Party; but Thatcher replies 'out, out, out' to the three options.

November: Anglo-Irish summit.

**1985** Anglo-Irish talks proceed throughout the year. Orange marches through Catholic area in Portadown are re-routed. November: Anglo-Irish Accord signed.

**1986** January: 15 Westminster by-elections due to Unionist resignations in protest at the Accord. Unionists lose one seat to SDLP. March: One-day Protestant general strike against Accord. Violent clashes between RUC and Protestants. June: August: Further clashes between RUC and Protestants when Orange marches are re-routed. Hundreds of Catholics forced to move house because of sectarian attacks.

# Some economic facts

## NORTH AND SOUTH TODAY

The South is now (1984<sup>1</sup>) slightly more industrialised than the North. This is a big change from the previous pattern.

	South	North
Industrial % of value added	37%	35%
Industrial (excluding utilities) % of civilian employment	29%	27%

GDP per head on average is almost exactly the same in the South and in the North. Social benefits are also on similar levels — 1982 figures<sup>1</sup> for social benefits per head of total population were UK £1110, 26 Counties £1040.

Major differences:

● Southern industry is much more modern. Electronics accounts for over a third of manufacturing exports. Metals and engineering account for 38% of value added in manufacturing (1985), office and data processing for 19%<sup>2</sup>. Chemicals are now the next major sector.

In the North, 40% of jobs in manufacturing have gone since 1979. The remaining industry is generally old-fashioned and declining.

● The South is still more rural and agricultural. In the North a huge role is played by public service employment — 36% of total employment<sup>3</sup>. With higher unemployment (21% as against 17% in the South), over half the North's population is directly dependent on the British state for income (wage or benefit)<sup>4</sup>. Net subsidy from Britain to the North is £1.5 billion a year, about 30% of Northern Ireland's total income.

**So: economically the North is a drain on British capitalism, which has however been able to establish profitable relations with the independent South.**

**The condition of the working class is worse in the North than in the South (Northern Ireland is the worst-off region in the EEC after Calabria in Southern Italy). Protestant workers in the North are slightly better off than Catholic workers (Catholic unemployment is two-and-a-half times Protestant unemployment), so the Northern Protestant workers are on roughly the same level as the Southern workers. To see the Protestant workers as the pampered pets of imperialism and the Southern workers as 'Third World' people makes no sense.**

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE 26 COUNTIES SINCE 1958

	Then	Now
% of working population in agriculture	35% (1961)	17%
Urbanisation	46% (1960)	56%
Manufacturing % of exports	12% (1955)	68%
% of exports to UK	72% (1961)	35%
% of exports to other EEC countries	11% (1961)	34%

**Ireland is now an advanced capitalist country. It is on roughly the same level, as measured by National Income per head, as Southern Europe. In terms of the introduction of modern capitalist relations in the countryside, it has long been in advance of Southern Europe, since the landlords were bought out after 1903.**

## IRELAND AND FOREIGN CAPITAL

80% of the 26 Counties' manufacturing exports are produced by foreign-owned companies, which also employ almost half the country's manufacturing workers — and repatriate 60% of their profits. The 26 Counties also has a huge foreign debt.

But two other facts should be born in mind before this feature is cited as proof that the 26 Counties are still a 'semi-colony'.

Most of the foreign-owned companies are not from the country which the 26 Counties would presumably be a semi-colony of — Britain. Of about 900 foreign-owned companies, over 300 are US-owned, 130 West German, and only 200 or so UK-owned<sup>5</sup>.

And Ireland has been exporting capital since the 1870s. By 1914 Ireland was a creditor country and Irish capitalists had total investments abroad of £150 million<sup>6</sup>. A survey in 1964 found that Ireland had the fourth highest level of investment income from abroad, per head of population, in the world! Its inflow of investment income was \$104 million, its outflow \$67 million<sup>6</sup>. Only in more recent years has the inflow of capital to Ireland made it a clear debtor country.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the time of Partition there was a stark contrast between the North and the South. In 1911<sup>7</sup> Ulster had 48% of all Ireland's industrial workers, and Belfast alone, 21%. The North exported manufactured goods internationally (a large proportion to the US); the South, agricultural produce, mainly to Britain.

*17th century:* semi-feudal land relations, but under the 'Ulster Custom' Protestant tenants in the north-east have more security and a property right on improvements they make to the land. Attempts to clear peasants off land to make room for sheep and cattle. Big outflow of cash to absentee English landlords.

*18th century:* growth of linen industry, especially in north-east, as a rural cottage industry. Weaver-peasants do deals with merchant capitalists rather than wage-work for industrial capitalists.

*After 1800 (Act of Union):* decline of industry in South, rise of Belfast industry (linen, shipbuilding, engineering). Before 1800 most of the linen trade from the north-east had gone through Dublin merchants; after 1800 it goes through Belfast; and by 1835 Belfast is a busier port than Dublin. *There is no integrated all Ireland economy.*

*After Famine of 1840s:* massive depopulation — people replaced by sheep and cattle.

*After 1885, and especially after Wyndham Land Act of 1903:* British government decides to 'buy out' landlords to pacify Irish countryside. A 'bourgeois revolution' on the land — from above.

*After 1932:* 26 Counties shifts to economic nationalism. 'Economic War' between 26 Counties and Britain. Industrial employment expands by 50% between 1931 and 1938, but at a cost.

*From mid-'50s:* With the old nationalist policy leading to stagnation, the 26 Counties reopens its economy to the world market.

*1972:* Ireland joins the EEC. Major benefits for Irish farmers.

**Ireland today is highly integrated into the international economy. The 26 Counties exports 53% of what it produces, and is increasingly tied into the EEC. Any economic policy today seeking to cut Ireland off from the rest of the world economy is utopian and reactionary.**

<sup>1</sup> EEC statistics

<sup>2</sup> Financial Times survey on Ireland, 8-7-86

<sup>3</sup> Irish Times, 26-8-85

<sup>4</sup> 1983 figures in this table from World Bank and from Oxford Economic Atlas of the World

<sup>5</sup> L. M. Cullen, 'An economic history of Ireland since 1900' p. 160ff

<sup>6</sup> 'Britain's Invisible Earnings', 1967, chapter on 'World Comparison of Invisibles'

<sup>7</sup> Michael Farrell, 'Northern Ireland: The Orange State'

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**No.1** (published as 'Socialist Organiser magazine'): 'Magnificent Miners: The 1984-5 strike', 75p.

**No.2** (published as 'Socialist Organiser magazine'): 'Illusions of power: the local government left 1979-85', 60p.

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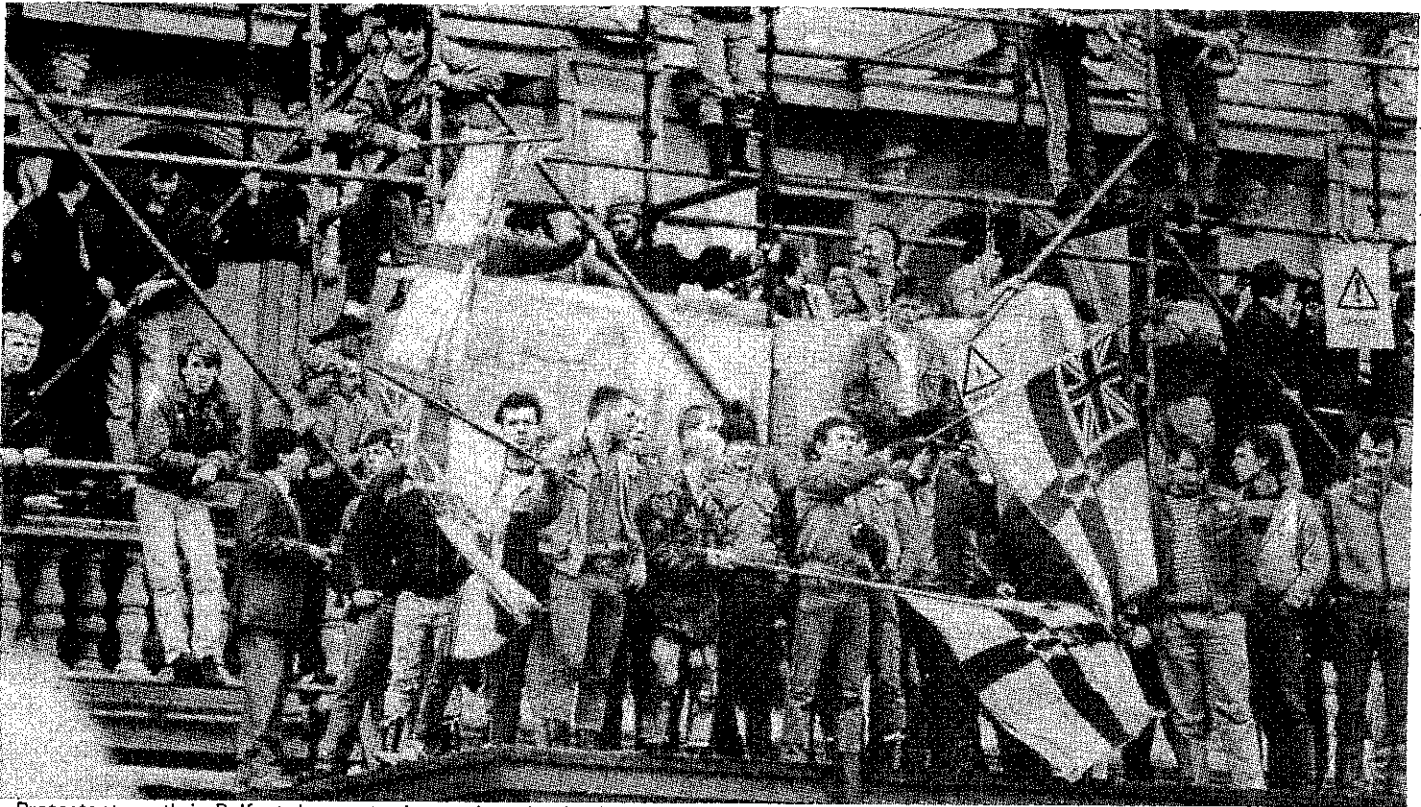
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## Ireland 1969-85

**A socialist analysis**

50p plus postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Protestant youth in Belfast demonstrating against the Anglo-Irish deal

## INTRODUCTION

A FEW years ago Socialist Organiser published a polemical article by the Irish Republican Socialist Party against my views on Ireland. The anonymous writers gave this assessment of what Socialist Organiser was trying to do when we started to carry articles which explicitly questioned ideas and attitudes that had by then become established as articles of faith for most of the British and Irish left.

*"Like a World War 2 Japanese soldier emerging from some Pacific island in a later decade. O'Mahony wants to revive old battles fought over the years against the logic of anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland"*

I replied: *"In the present state of the Republican movement and the Catholic revolt in the Six Counties, only a stern devotion to an inner vision can lead the writers to the conclusion that the debates of the late '60s and early '70s about the relations of socialism and the Republican movement are a matter of history, decided in favour of the physical force Republicans."*

*"Quite the opposite. The impasse in Northern Ireland makes these burning questions of the moment."*

That was in April 1982. Since then Sinn Fein has gone political and encroached on what was previously the SDLP's monopoly of 'politics' within the Catholic community. James Prior's rolling devolution has come and gone, refusing to roll. And now the Anglo-Irish Agreement has stirred the Six Counties into a turmoil not known there for over a decade.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement gives the Dublin government a share of political power in Northern Ireland and, through the permanent secretariat, a direct presence there, though the executive, the police and the army, remain completely in British hands. It is potentially a very important change in the entire framework of Northern

Ireland politics. But the only important change it has brought about so far is to murderously intensify the Protestant/Catholic antagonism. Nothing fundamental has changed: the underlying issues remain what they were in 1982, or 1972, or in 1922. The Anglo-Irish Agreement has only emphasised and underlined those issues, and stirred them up to white heat. The central, all-shaping fact in Northern Ireland is the Protestant-Catholic division.

If the anonymous IRSP writers could express annoyance that SO had raised certain questions that was only because, though there had been much discussion in the period 1968 to '71, from 1971 to now the press of the Marxist left has not seriously discussed Ireland at all\*.

Militant has confined itself to shrill denunciations of the Provisional IRA right from the beginning of its campaign. The denunciations in the paper are often made even cruder and more hysterical by Militant's supporters on the ground in the labour movement, who are sometimes more envenomed and more uncomprehending than straight right-wingers.

But Militant is the odd one out. Socialist Worker and the press of the Workers' Revolutionary Party were given to uttering shrill panic-stricken cries of denunciation and dissociation when the first IRA bombs went off in Britain in 1972 and 1973, but after a while they calmed down, learned to take bombs in Britain more or less in their stride and 'defended' the Republicans.

For the left press apart from Militant, everything soon came to revolve around the single demand 'Troops Out', incongruously entwined with calls for socialism now (Socialist Worker) or ludicrous assertions that the Provo war

was the permanent revolution, the socialist revolution in an early stage (Red Weekly, Socialist Challenge, Socialist Action). Of discussion about the problems and particularities of Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole there was little or none.

In fact, as the '70s drew on, and the fundamental realities of Northern Ireland became even more stark and clear in their outlines, posing sharp and unavoidable questions for socialists, discussion of the problems became more, not less, rare.

In the collective imagination of the 'hard' left, which had no answers to the real problems in Northern Ireland, Ireland became just another colonial revolt, though the facts insistently said otherwise. For most of the left, the Protestants could be ignored. They had frustrated the entire strategy of the British government in 1974, but they did not have to be taken into account.

To take a classic example, when in the 1983 election Sinn Fein got 42% of the Catholic vote, which was 15% of the Northern Ireland vote, Socialist Action carried a report under the headline '42% for Sinn Fein'.

The failure of the left even to try to discuss the obvious complexities and problems of Ireland is astonishing. It is one of the mysteries that this issue of Workers' Liberty sets out to explore and explain.

### II

It is best to set out briefly here how Socialist Organiser and Workers' Liberty see the war in Ireland, and what we think is wrong with the ideas and politics of the

mainstream British hard left on Ireland.

The Catholic revolt in the Six Counties is a just revolt against the intolerable consequences of Partition for the nationalist community there. We are for the Catholics. But the Catholic revolt is crippling limited as a nationalist movement by being confined — as it has been for nearly two decades — to maybe 15% of the Catholic population of the 32 Counties, and opposed by one million Protestant Irish people.

It is crippled and limited also as a potentially socialist workers' movement by the opposition to it of the big majority of the working class in Northern Ireland.

For these reasons it seems to us that the IRA's present war is very much more likely to lead to full-scale communal civil war — and then to bloody repartition — than to a united Ireland, or to be the beginning of the Irish socialist revolution.

But most of the left spin beguiling and consoling 'socialist' fantasies. Though there is much talk of a dialogue between the British left and Sinn Fein, all the British left has done is to act like an empty echo chamber, throwing a debased version of the views of the Sinn Fein leadership back at Sinn Fein.

Much of the British far left sees in Ireland only a typical struggle for national liberation against imperialism. Dismissing the Protestant question as just an offshoot, an epiphenomenon of imperialism, they refuse to recognise that the Catholic-Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland is a major autonomous problem.

Almost all of them treat the one million strong Irish Protestant minority — who for the most part deserve to be *opposed politically* — as if they do not exist or at any rate as if they need not to be taken into account. And some socialists regard them with envenomed animosity expressed as opposition to 'imperialism' and its supporters in Ireland.

Thus dismissing the workers of the minority Protestant-Unionist community, who are a large proportion of the Irish working class, they indulge all the more freely and fantastically in far-fetched talk about the socialist allegedly implicit in the military and political campaign of the Republicans in the Six Counties.

Following the more naive Sinn Feiners, they believe that if British troops were withdrawn the Protestant community would quickly disappear as a political and military force; Ireland would easily be united and everything would soon be fine.

But that view is *self-evidently* false. Without a political settlement, the withdrawal of British troops — that is, the abdication of the existing state in Northern Ireland — will lead not to a united Ireland but inevitably to civil war, involving big forced population movements and mutual communal slaughter, culminating in a virtually certain, and permanent, repartition.

Socialism, not to speak of Marxism, demands of us that we deal with reality actively, realistically, critically because this is the only way to change it. We must face reality squarely or we will never learn how to change and transform it. Fantasy politics is passive, consumerist politics, not revolutionary politics.

At the other political pole, the tiny British and Irish Communist Organisation and its fronts, like 'The Socialist', produce

allegedly Marxist literature whose sole political message is a mindless justification of partition, of Unionism, and of British imperialism in Ireland. Their proposed 'solution' to the breakdown of the Six Counties political entity is that its Catholic nationalist victims, who are now in the 18th year of their just revolt against it, should after all accept the status quo ante. These 'Stalino-Unionists' parallel the anti-Protestant attitudes of some Republicans and socialists with an explicit contempt and animosity towards the national aspirations of the majority Irish community.

In a sense these — the cheerleaders for Sinn Fein on the one side, the pro-Unionists on the other — are the two polar attitudes into which the participants in the abortive discussions on the left at the end of the '60s split. Both sides in this 'dialogue of the deaf' deal at best in partial truths. The labour movement needs to tell itself the full truth about Ireland.

We need to tell ourselves the truth about British repression in Ireland, but also the truth about Catholic-nationalist bourgeois rule in the South, and about the living conditions, oppressions and struggles of all the workers of Ireland, Unionist and nationalist alike.

Back in the '30s, in the middle of that long epoch when the 'dictatorship of the Stalinist lie' ruled and corrupted much of the labour movement, Leon Trotsky rightly placed telling the truth at the heart of his revolutionary credo. "To face reality squarely, to speak the truth in little things and in big ones, these are the rules" of revolutionary socialist politics.

For Ireland, they are the *sine qua non* of revolutionary socialist politics.

Now the Anglo-Irish deal and the overwhelming Protestant rejection of it have thrown the Six Counties into turmoil. In face of these events Neil Kinnock and the parliamentary leadership of the Labour Party have used the occasion to restore Labour-Tory bipartisanship on Ireland. In effect Labour's commitment to a united Ireland has been consigned to the political lumber room.

Despite its leadership the British labour movement must turn itself into a force fighting for justice for Ireland, for conciliation and unity between the British and Irish labour movements, and for reconciliation between the communally divided sections of the Irish working class.



This issue of *Workers' Liberty* consists in about equal proportions of a wide-ranging discussion which took place in the pages of *Socialist Organiser* during the first half of 1983, and of an imaginary dialogue published here for the first time.

The central axis of the discussion in *SO* was the question of the Six Counties Protestant community. How do we assess and characterise that community, and what should our attitude to it be? What does the Catholic-Protestant split mean for the present war and for socialist politics in Ireland? A comprehensive range of the viewpoints on the revolutionary left will be found in the present collection.

So far as I know, this is the only such discussion that has taken place on the

revolutionary left throughout the long years during which Northern Ireland has been in bloody impasse.

The imaginary dialogue which makes up about half this issue of *Workers' Liberty* was written in the spirit of Hamlet's advice to his mother: 'If you lack a virtue, assume it'. If you lack dialogue, if there is neither serious dialogue nor real discussion on the left, then try to imagine how it would go if there were an intensive dialogue.

The first four of the six sections ('sessions') were written in 1983, partly in response to documents circulated among *Socialist Organiser* supporters by Tony Richardson on the eve of a national gathering of *SO* supporters which would vote on a motion to forbid advocacy of any sort of federal Ireland in *SO*. Though I've pruned and edited it here and there, the dialogue's origins in the heat of a factional dispute in which my opponents had set as their goal a formal ban on my views from the pages of *SO* will, I fear, still be discernible.

It proved impossible to get the dialogue out before the national gathering of *SO* supporters in August 1983, and since that meeting voted to endorse the position I had been putting in *SO*, afterwards there was not enough incentive to do the work needed to get the material into print in preference to doing other and more pressing work. The fifth and sixth 'sessions' of the dialogue was written for this magazine.

If the dialogue is imaginary, the arguments are not. Here and there there is a touch of deliberate caricature — and it is meant to be obvious — but in substance the arguments of my opponents are portrayed strictly as I understand them to be in reality. The reader will of course keep it in mind that this is a polemic from one side of the argument, and not a real dialogue; one side of the dispute can only speak here with arguments their opponent supplies or can understand from what they say and write. Speaking for themselves they might do better; but readers can judge that from the first part of this magazine, where they do speak for themselves. Future issues of *Workers' Liberty* will carry any responses submitted for publication.

The coverage of Ireland in *Workers' Fight* and *Workers' Action*, with which I was associated, is partly an exception. We carried some criticism of the Republicans, refrained from fantasising about the socialism some saw as implicit in the Catholic revolt, and in the small print of articles frequently though in passing talked of 'autonomy' for the Protestant area in a future united Ireland. But on the whole our headlines and central focus were too indistinguishable from the rest of the left.

We carried most of the ideas I express in this magazine — circumscribed within a distorting framework of opposition to British imperialism as the first priority and 'solidarity' with the Republicans as the delimiting consideration.

*Everything* submitted to *Socialist Organiser* for this discussion was printed in *SO*. It was Tony Richardson's own choice to circulate his two articles in duplicated form just on the eve of the *SO* national meeting in August 1983. After his initial letter denouncing me, he submitted nothing more to *SO* during the long debate stirred up by that letter. He didn't need to bother too much about arguments; he could rely on the solidarity of the group which, together with Alan Thorneill, he led — the grouping which had previously, before supporting *SO* for a time, published the paper *Socialist Press* in Oxford.

# A way to workers' unity?

**In Socialist Organiser no 109 we carried an interview with a Belfast NHS shop steward, Micky Duffy. Duffy, a 'Militant' supporter, argued that the workers' unity in the NHS pay struggle opened the way to political class unity in Northern Ireland, which could be achieved by setting up a Northern Ireland Labour Party. In the letters page (SO 112) the Nottingham SO group argued that this interview was an 'unacceptable propaganda piece for the national chauvinist politics of the Militant'. In this article John O'Mahony looked at Militant's politics and how they should be answered (SO 113).**

FROM A working class point of view, the basic problem about the Six County state is that in that state framework working class unity developed on a trade union level has always shattered at any political test. So long as the 'constitutional question' remains at the heart of political life there, it always will shatter on the rooted communal antagonism between Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists.

There was no chance that the NHS dispute could open the way to unity in the sectarian Six County entity. Even spectacular examples of Protestant/Catholic working class unity have proved to be mere episodes.

For example, in the well-known 'outdoor relief' fight in 1932, unity in working-class resistance to cuts in social security payments was possible because both Catholics and Protestants were hit impartially. Barricades went up in the Protestant Shankill Road and in the Catholic Falls Road. Activists went from the

Falls to man Shankill barricades, and from the Shankill to defend the Falls against the police. (Some on both sides were influenced by the Irish Stalinists).

Within weeks of this spectacular unity, no less spectacular sectarian rioting had been fomented. There are other examples, both before and after Partition.

The experience of the various incarnations of the Northern Ireland Labour Party runs in parallel to this. Today a very tiny Unionist rump, the NILP has at various times grown to a significant size.

It attempted to confine itself to bread and butter working class issues, that is, to generalised trade unionism, bargaining in the working class interest on the level of provincial and 'United Kingdom' society. It evaded, hedged and compromised on the issues that divide Northern Ireland's workers.

John De Courcy Ireland, an unsuccessful candidate in the last 26 County elections, wrote recently about his experience in the NILP in the '40s.

Their speakers on the Falls Road, he recalled, campaigned under the nationalist tricolour. In the 'mixed' centre of Belfast they campaigned under the Red Flag; and party leader Harry Midgley campaigned on the Shankill under the Union Jack.

Such a balancing act could not get far. Sectarian suspicions soon disrupted the party and scattered its forces.

To reject Militant's view of a Labour Party as the cure-all is not to say that socialists should not work in a Labour Party if it exist-

ed. Serious work was done, for example, in the late '60s in the Derry Labour Party, which became central to the civil rights struggle.

Even after it split, Eamonn McCann could get 9000 votes on a revolutionary socialist platform as the Derry Young Socialists candidate in the mid-1970 election.

Yet McCann's experience, too, underlines the basic point that simply trying to generalise from trade unionism within the Six County framework is no solution. The Derry Labour Party left wing tended to ignore the national question, and was bypassed by the eruption of the Republican movement. Their forces scattered, too: some went to the Officials and then to the IRSP, one or two to Militant.

Many well-intentioned tricks have been tried to unite Northern Ireland workers. In 1907 Jim Larkin had united Protestant and Catholic workers on a trade union level. When it came to the marching and rioting season on July 12, he tried to preserve the unity by organising his own united Orange/Catholic working class parade around the walls of Derry.

The Protestant workers, said Larkin, would march in honour of King William, who secured their liberty in the 'Glorious Revolution'. The Catholics would march to honour the Pope, who at that time had taken the Papal State into the international alliance against France of which William was part!

They had a successful, and unique, parade round Derry. Within weeks sectarian rioting had shattered the working class unity.

In 1969, again, Cyril Toman, a member of the socialist People's Democracy (different then from the present PD) tried preaching socialism to Protestant workers by erecting the Union Jack above his platform. In the years since Protestant sectarianism has hardened, and Toman has moved to become one of Sinn Fein's 12

**'Militant lacks the democratic programme which has to be part of filling the void between trade union minimalism and the socialist revolution'**



candidates in the recent Six Counties election.

The inescapable conclusion is that general political unity cannot be developed on the basis of the trade union ('economic') unity; and that unity in trade union action is not the harbinger of a stable class unity.

But many on the left, it seems to me, go on from this basic fact to a general dismissal of any concern for working class unity. The national question, they seem to say, supersedes everything else in Northern Ireland.

The trade-union class struggle is of little importance. The Protestant working class — that is, the big majority of the working class — is no concern of ours. The struggle for socialism will develop out of the revolt of the oppressed Catholics, even though that revolt fails to mobilise, and indeed antagonises, the Protestant workers.

We concern ourselves only with the 'anti-imperialist' military campaign of organisations representing perhaps half the Catholic third of the Six County population. Only when that campaign is victorious will questions like working class unity be important.

This, I believe, is the mirror image of the Militant caricature of socialist and Marxist politics.

What in fact is wrong with Militant's approach to Ireland?

It relates only selectively and arbitrarily to the issues, processes, and struggles in Ireland. It pretends that struggles like the NHS pay battle, involving workers from both communities, already amount to, or by way of being generalised into a new Northern Ireland Labour Party, can be made into, working class political unity.

It goes from this to general socialist propaganda about nationalising the entire economy (which is essentially what they understand the socialist revolution to be: there is no space here to criticise their bureaucratic, statist, and somewhat 1890s-Fabian conception of socialism).

In between sub-political industrial issues, and the political maximum, the socialist revolution, there is a great void. The void is what's wrong with their politics, not that they advocate and want to build working class inter-communal unity at any level possible, and not that they make propaganda for socialism.

A working class political party that can really unite the working class in Ireland, specifically in Northern Ireland, will have to be one that can honestly answer all the problems the key sections of the working class face — and in the first place the 'constitutional question'. Militant's answer is the same as its answer to every living struggle in Britain or anywhere else — propaganda for 'socialism, the only road', combined with a routinist and politically accommodationist approach to the basic struggles of the working class and the labour movement.

From this general approach has flowed its record over the last 13 years. Initially it opposed the deployment of British troops on the streets after August 1969, and sympathised with the Catholics. It quickly veered (by 1970 or '71) to an attitude of condemning the 'sectionalism' and then the 'terrorism' of the Catholics. It was like its attitude to the struggles of blacks, women, gays and others in Britain itself: the Catholic revolt in Northern Ireland was a complication it wished would go away.

Ever since they have not supported the just revolt of the Catholics. Within the labour movement they are among the most vicious opponents of any attempt to get a calm discussion of the Republicans, their struggle and their objectives. Militant peddles its own cure-alls and nostrums, the famous 'trade union defence force', for example.

A good idea — for a different society. The workforce is heavily stratified as a result of sectarian job preference. This affects the unions, where unity has been possible only on minimal trade union questions and by avoiding politics. The unions reflect the society they exist in. The Protestant UDA is the nearest thing to a trade union militia that Northern Ireland will see this side of a revolutionary change of working class consciousness.

Essentially Militant lacks the democratic programme which has to be part of filling the void between trade union minimalism and the socialist revolution. It relates to the political world around it by pretending that the communal divide can be ignored, and that the national question can be pushed aside.

This is a recipe for building a sect in Northern Ireland: it has as little chance of uniting the Six County working class as the previous Labour Party minimalists had.

No political formation that does not have in its programme a democratic solution to the Irish national question and to the communal antagonisms in Northern Ireland will even begin to play a positive role in Irish politics.

The best democratic programme, I believe, is that of a federal united Ireland with as much autonomy for the Protestant community as is compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people. An all-Ireland revolutionary movement must be built which integrates this with the direct work of educating and organising the labour movement to fight for workers' power, and which links up with the workers' movement internationally, especially in Britain and in Europe, on the programme of the United Socialist States of Europe.

From this viewpoint the polar opposite to Militant is the IRSP. Instead of pretending that the national question will fade away if socialists concentrate on working class unity, they pretend that the problem of working class unity will fade away if socialists concentrate on the national question. In effect, they pretend that the Protestant working class does not exist — and talk and act accordingly. We get the obscenity of radical — if somewhat eclectic — socialists who function as Catholic sectarians.

It is very easy for British Marxists who reject Militant's approach with contempt to lapse into an attitude not too different from the IRSP's. We sympathise with the Catholic revolt. We recognise, like the Republicans that Partition helped intensify and now perpetuates the communal divide.

We know that the overall responsibility is Britain's. We defend the right of the Republican movement to opt for armed struggle. We find ourselves, living in Britain, obliged to combat the pressures around us and to champion and defend the Republicans.

That explains, but does not justify, the fact that in the last decade a simple-minded petty bourgeois nationalist version of Irish history has become dominant on the left — some of it ideas that James Connolly himself was polemicising against three quarters of a century ago.

We have a duty to support the Republican movement against the British state. That does not mean a duty to side ideologically with the Republicans against Irish anti-Republican or sectarian socialists, or to consider the latter as beyond legitimate discussion. Such a conclusion would amount to denying to British, and even Irish, socialists, the right to any independent judgment on the issues.





Mass Protestant demonstration against the abolition of the Protestant home-rule parliament in 1972. In the foreground: Orange leader William Craig. Photo: Camera Press.

# No autonomy for pro-imperialists!

**Tony Richardson**  
SO 115

I AM writing to take up and disagree with John O'Mahony's article on Ireland in SO 113.

The article is supposed to be dealing with Militant's politics but in reality, presents O'Mahony's own views on Ireland.

In this I think he shares an erroneous view with the Editorial in issue 112, which talks about the solution in Ireland being "some form of federal, united Ireland (since when was this SO policy?) with as much autonomy for the Protestant minority as is compatible with the rights of the Irish people as a whole."

First of all, quite obviously, the only solution is a socialist, united Ireland.

But as O'Mahony correctly says, on the road to

that are other demands: I don't think any form of autonomy for the Protestants should be one of those demands.

Of course they should have freedom of religion, etc. But insofar as they are a 'community' they identify themselves through their pro-imperialism.

As long as this distinct, pro-imperialist base, organised as such, exists, with full or limited autonomy, then it will be impossible for the Irish people to begin to solve their problems.

The fact is that the Republican movement is anti-imperialist, as is most of the Catholic population.

Comrade O'Mahony tries to minimise their strength, but this is not the really important point.

Northern Ireland is dominated economically and militarily by imperialism. The starting point for

us must be the struggle to end that.

Of course, within that struggle we attempt to give it a class content by fighting for the Permanent Revolution. In this we oppose the solely nationalist illusions of the Provisionals and their conscious antagonising of the Protestant working class.

This means connecting the anti-imperialist struggle with the need for the working class to take power through a socialist programme.

This means that within united class struggles, like the NHS, we raise the connection of anti-capitalism with anti-imperialism.

Trade union struggles are not "sub-political"; they are spontaneous, but contain within them the possibilities for developing the consciousness of the more reactionary elements in the working class.

But the starting point of this is to break down the pro-imperialism of the Protestant workers.

Britain is an imperialist country, specifically the country oppressing Ireland. It is the duty of socialists in Britain to prove their anti-imperialism. The stress on "democratic" solutions, in an imperialist "democracy", the dissolving of defence of the Republican movement in a mass of words defending the Protestant community, I think only softens the principled approach to the liberation struggle.

Comrade O'Mahony may say that the Provisionals are for a federal solution. But the PLO also want a state in the West Bank. We do not tail-end these movements. The only solution is a united Ireland which we fight to be socialist, as we fight for the smashing of the state of Israel.

# Maximalist and abstract

**Jim Denham**  
**SO 116**

SO no 115 carries two letters on Ireland, both critical of John O'Mahony's article in SO 113 and of SO's Irish coverage in general. Peter Jones makes a valid criticism of the paper's inadequate coverage of both industrial struggles (e.g. NHS, De Lorean) and of developments within the Republican movement - notably the emergence of a campaigning, leftist current around people like Gerry Adams, in opposition to the old guard militarist nationalists. I hope comrade Jones' constructive criticism will be taken to heart by SO.

Tony Richardson's letter, however, is a horse of another colour. He typifies the kind of maximalist, abstract sloganising that has passed

for 'analysis' for too long within the British Trotskyist movement. Apparently incapable of developing any programme beyond the endless repetition of timeless truisms ('the only solution is a socialist united Ireland'.... 'this means connecting the anti-imperialist struggle with the need for the working class to take power through a socialist programme'), Richardson actually reproduces all the methodological errors of 'Militant', albeit with a nationalist, rather than economic bent.

Worse, he counterposes his maximalist phrase-mongering to O'Mahony's proposals for a democratic programme to deal with the national question, which would take into account and (hopefully) neutralise the protestant community's fear of and hostility towards unification. Such a static, dead-end approach is completely alien to the method of Trotskyism and can only help reproduce and perpetuate the very 'pro-imperialism' that the comrade seems to feel is reason enough to deny the protestants any degree of autonomy within a united Ire-

land. A vicious circle, indeed!

Surely, it is A-B-C for revolutionaries to both give unconditional but critical support to the anti-imperialist struggle and to seek to win over (or at least, neutralise) the protestant working class by developing a programme of democratic and transitional demands to answer their fears regarding the effects of being a minority within a clerical state. So while Richardson pays lip service to the need to 'break down the pro-imperialism of the protestant workers', he actually offers no proposals for setting about such a mammoth task, but still feels able to breezily dismiss O'Mahony's tentative guide-lines.

Finally, what exactly does comrade Richardson mean by 'fighting for the permanent revolution' in the Irish context? If he uses the phrase loosely, to mean attempting to establish the maximum unity between the national and the economic struggles, as part of the fight for a socialist Ireland, then fine (although it might have been better not to have used the phrase). But I suspect he

means more that that - and is attempting to suggest that Trotsky's very precise theory is applicable to the Irish situation.

This suggests either a fundamental misunderstanding of Trotsky's theory, or a considerable ignorance of the nature of Irish society. Trotsky specified that his theory related to countries with a 'belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries', where the peasantry is 'the overwhelming majority of the population'. In such countries, he argued that socialism could only be achieved by the proletariat making an alliance with the 'peasant masses' to attain the 'complete and genuine solution' of the national and agrarian questions.

Does comrade Richardson seriously believe that such a strategy is appropriate in an advanced, industrialised country like Ireland? The idea that 'Permanent Revolution' can be applied to Ireland is surely preposterous, and has led many would-be 'Trotskyists' to the most bizarre conclusions in the past.

# Only for the oppressed

**Tony Gard**  
**SO 118**

JIM Denham's letter in SO 116 compounds the confusion in the calls for Protestant autonomy within a federal, united Ireland which have appeared in recent issues of Socialist Organiser. He says this is part of a democratic programme to "take into account and (hopefully) neutralise the protestant community's fear of and hostility towards unification."

This leaves out of account the political role allotted to the Protestant community by imperialism and the basis for that community's hostility to Irish unity.

Autonomy for minority groups can have a legitimate place in a Marxist programme, e.g. a call for an autonomous Kashmir in a united socialist states of India, or autonomy for the Basque country in Spain. In all these cases autonomy would involve

oppressed, disadvantaged minorities.

The Moslem population of Kashmir were forced into the Union of India in 1947 on the whim of their Sikh prince, while centralising governments in Madrid have traditionally suppressed the cultural identity of the Basques.

The situation of the Northern Ireland Protestants is quite different. This community has for generations been used as the agent of British imperialism to oppress, exploit and divide Ireland; in return it has enjoyed relative material privileges compared with the Catholic majority. Partition enshrined these privileges, empowered the Protestants to oppress the Catholics in the north, and perpetuated the division of the Irish working class.

The task for Marxists is to convince Protestant workers that their interests lie in unity with the Catholic working class. Of course that must involve the formulation of democratic demands, but in the Irish context autonomy and federalism can only be seen as concessions to Protestants' current sec-

tionary, pro-imperialist consciousness. Thus it reinforces rather than overcomes the division of the working class.

**'Autonomy can have a legitimate place for oppressed, disadvantaged minorities... but in the Irish context autonomy can only be seen as a concession to the Protestants' pro-imperialist consciousness'.**

Naturally Protestants fear that they would be

disadvantaged in a Catholic Ireland, and we should call for full civil and religious rights for both Protestants and Catholics within a fully secular state. But that is a far cry from autonomy.

What would autonomy mean in practice? However you draw the border an autonomous Protestant province would still include a substantial body of Catholic workers. A number of geographically separate Protestant enclaves (part of Belfast, parts of Antrim, a few streets in Derry etc., etc), perhaps linked by a communal assembly, would not avoid the problem, and the administrative chaos would be a breeding ground for sectarian strife.

The only alternative to geographical autonomy would be special legal provisions, reserved seats in Parliament, reserved posts in the government and so on; in other words a confessional state on the lines of Lebanon.

Clearly the talk of Protestant autonomy is the reverse of a democratic demand. It is a reactionary, divisive notion which has no part in a Marxist programme.

# Protestants and Provos

**John  
O'Mahony  
SO 118-119**

Writers in Socialist Organiser have been talking "in the small print" about the rights of the Protestants since we started the paper in 1978 and I have been writing about the question for over 16 years — usually, for the last 11 of those years, in articles defending and explaining the Republicans and their war.

We usually express it as a general idea — 'as much autonomy as is compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people' — because to advocate some precise scheme would risk descending into panacea-mongering. (For myself, I think the best unit for federalism would be the four counties where a very big majority is Protestant). In my view there are only two other alternatives: conquer the Protestants, or drop the whole idea of a united Ireland for now and accept partition as it is. A focus on 'socialism now' and proposals for working class unity on socialist class politics as the immediate solution to the existing communal divide in Northern Ireland is, in the circumstances, a variant of the latter. It can be nothing else.

In SO federalism has not been advocated instead of support for the Catholic revolt and (against Britain) for those leading it: it has been argued for as a necessary part of a policy to bring that revolt to the successful conclusion of a united and politically independent Ireland; and as a necessary part of our programme for uniting Catholic and Protestant workers in Ireland to fight for socialism.

Such unity is impossible while the working class is segmented into two subordinate parts of the two communal blocs who relate to each other so murderously because

one — the Catholic — has long been oppressed in the Six County state, and the other — the Protestant — fears becoming the same sort of oppressed minority in an all-Ireland state.

For anyone to assert that Socialist Organiser, or I myself 'dissolve' a defence of the Republican movement against Britain 'in a mass of words defending the Protestant community' is a straightforward libel. The central focus of the paper, front-page articles and so on, has consistently been defence of the Catholics and Republicans, and denunciation of the British government, its allies and its policy.

I think Tony Richardson (letters, SO 115) wants to say that any criticism of the Republicans for their attitude to the Protestants and any reference to a solution involving rights for the Irish Protestants as a community, is impermissible. He should say that and argue for it without libellous demagoguery.

In this article I want to spell out my conception of what is involved, and hope thereby to provide the starting point

## 'The Protestants are a distinct community'

for a more detailed and serious discussion than we have been able to have recently.

Back in 1972, when the Provisionals forced Britain to abolish the Protestant supremacist government at Stormont and victory seemed in sight, they adopted federalism (albeit in a peculiar and untenable form) as a democratic framework for coexistence between Catholics and Protestants in a united Ireland.

Against the opposition of veteran Republican leaders like David O'Connell and Rory O'Brady, it was dropped as policy in late 1981 and from Sinn Fein's



RUC break up nationalist protest. Photo: Derek Speirs, Report

constitution three months ago. 'Recognition' as a distinct segment of the Irish people has been withdrawn from them and now the Protestants are defined as just 'pro-imperialist'.

O'Connell has described this move as the withdrawal of 'the hand of friendship offered to the Protestant people of Ireland' in the heady days of 1972. I think he is right.

Thus the Republicans' turn to 'radical campaigning', led by northerners like Gerry Adams, is unfortunately accompanied by a plain and explicit Catholic-sectarian turn. Arguably, it was always implied in what they have been doing, as distinct from what they have been saying, but now the Northern Provos have followed the INLA into explicitly leaving themselves no possible way of relating to the Protestants except by an attempt to conquer them. The politically lightweight INLA has long used the Provos' present 'political' definition of the Protestants as a licence for open, or very thinly disguised, sectarian assassinations.

But the irreducible, ineradicable and inescapable fact is that the Protestants are a distinct community, a separate section of the Irish people, who have their own special history, culture and present viewpoint. They are entitled to equality and respect for what they are in so far as that does not mean oppressing or denying

the rights of the much bigger Catholic Irish population.

The problem is that the rights claimed for the Irish Catholic majority by the neo-Republicans now include the democratically indefensible 'right' to deny to the Northern Ireland Protestants any special arrangements as a community.

At an earlier period some of the Protestants were the democratic and revolutionary vanguard. They founded the Irish Republican movement in the 1790s and were its most reliable and most conscious militants and insurgents. It is true that they have played a bad role in modern Irish history for 150 years and more. It is true that they have more than had their interests looked after because of their alliance with key sections of the British ruling class.

However, to say, as Tony Richardson does, that 'insofar as they are a 'community', they identify themselves through their 'pro-imperialism', is both untrue and beside the point.

It is to substitute a different question (their relationship with Britain over the centuries) for the one we are in fact discussing under the heading of 'federalism' — the question of what they are in Ireland, and how they have related, do relate and should relate to the four million other Irish people. The problem is to change their relationship with the rest of the Irish people.

They are a community put down in Ireland mainly by free immigration from England and Scotland and, much less importantly, by official British colonisation. Close connections, two-way migrations, even joint states — Scotland gets its name from a kingdom of Irish colonists there, the Irish then being called Scots — have existed between parts of Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland from time immemorial.

After the Reformation and the Elizabethan reconquest of Ireland in the 1590s, such settlers developed a special relationship with the English rulers against the much less developed Catholic natives whose lands were taken in a series of confiscations. Something like a replica of British bourgeois society evolved among the settlers, especially in the North, during the 17th century and after.

### **‘The Protestant... hostility to being incorporated as a minority in a backward and priest-ridden Catholic bourgeois state’.**

Finally, in the 20th century, they got their own sectarian statelet after a section of the British and Anglo-Irish ruling class, led by the Tory Party and by a future Tory prime minister, Bonar Law, had brought Britain close to civil war rather than agree to a limited measure of Home Rule for a united Ireland.

That’s the outline of the dominant element in the historical picture.

There is also another side to it. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the opposition of the Protestant masses — including what was then by far the main section of the Irish proletariat — to a united Ireland was fundamentally a matter of their hostility and die-in-the-last-ditch opposition to being incorpora-

ted as a minority in a largely agrarian, backward and priest-ridden Catholic bourgeois state. That’s what it was about fundamentally. That is what made the Protestant masses in the North available to sections of the British and Anglo-Irish ruling class as political and military shock troops against a united Ireland and against the social struggle of the Catholics (during the land war in the South between landlords and tenants in the 1880s, for example).

They were bound to England and its ruling class — and remember that some of them, as we have seen, were not always so bound — in the first place because they were aware that they were different, that their part of Ireland was more advanced. They felt threatened by any political system which would give unrestrained majority rule to the Catholics on the island.

Today they are driven by uncompromising opposition to incorporation into the Catholic confessional state that has evolved in the South since Partition.

Only if the Irish national revolution in the early 20th century had taken a radical working-class-led form, and had been able to link up with a radical British working class movement, could the division in the Irish people, and in the first place the division in the Irish working class, have found a framework within which it could perhaps have healed rapidly. This was by no means inconceivable.

For example, the British working class militancy of 1919 to 1921 found a powerful echo in Northern Ireland in the great Belfast engineering strikes of 1919 — during the ‘Black and Tan’ war, and at a time when there were radical social currents developing in the South (‘soviets’ were declared by strikers at small cooperative dairies in 1920).

But the movements did not coalesce. History evolved differently. 1920 saw the armed struggle against Britain in the South paralleled in Belfast by the savage pogroms against Catholics during which the Catholics were driven out of the shipyards and many

moved South as refugees.

In history there are many similar tragic examples of the socially most developed section of a people being turned against the struggles of the agrarian oppressed. In Mexico workers and trade unionists were organised to fight the peasant insurgents during the revolution of 1910-17. In Italy militant Northern workers had a quasi-racist attitude to the agrarian and backward South, and to southerners in their midst, etc.

In Ireland this town vs country antagonism intermeshed with the struggle of the British state to keep a grip on Ireland, mainly for military-imperial reasons. (In pursuit of military security the British state had also carried out an agrarian revolution from above. It was completed by the Free State in the 1920s, eliminating the landlords). It was compounded and deepened by the fact that the Protestants mostly considered themselves British, and the Catholics ‘Irish Irelanders’.

Of course it could have been different if there had existed a powerful revolutionary socialist party in Britain. If . . . if . . . Instead it turned out tragically, as have so many other situations, for lack of an adequate revolutionary movement.

### **‘In history there are many tragic examples of the socially developed section of a people being turned against the struggles of the agrarian oppressed.’**

Ireland was partitioned, and partitioned in such a way that a Catholic minority was incorporated against its will into the Protestant state, where it was a minority of the Six County population proportionately

bigger than the Protestant minority would have been in a united Ireland.

Because of its size, disaffection, and affinity with the 26 County state, the Catholic minority was always seen as a threat to the Protestant state.

Within the Northern Ireland cockpit, the divided working class faced slump and mass unemployment. The advantages available to Protestant workers as a result of the uneasy dominance of the Protestant segment of Northern Ireland’s population grew to have great importance, underpinning and fixing the existing divisions in the working class.

In the South the Green Tories ruled. In Britain the labour bureaucracy betrayed and helped the ruling class defeat the revolutionary potential that existed in the ‘20s until after the betrayal of the General Strike.

In the 1930s and 1940s the Irish Stalinists gained a powerful influence in Northern Ireland — and sold it to British imperialism when Russia entered the war in 1941. They even ‘partitioned’ the ‘Communist Party’ into separate Northern and Southern parties (until 1970) and the Communist Party of Northern Ireland became for a time an outright jingo unionist party.

Partition became ‘permanent’, and the two Irish states — the Northern Ireland bourgeoisie did have full control of Northern Ireland’s internal affairs for 50 years — became sectarian caricatures of each other.

In the North the ruling class, in the person of the prime minister, talked of a ‘Protestant state for Protestant people’ and in the South from the mid-1920s legislation based on Catholic social teaching was systematically imposed, culminating in De Valera’s constitution of 1937. That constitution managed both to be Catholic in its social and ethical framework, and at the same time to lay formal claim to the whole of Ireland, including the Protestant areas!

The Southern Irish bourgeoisie talked of Irish unity, but they acted where they ruled like the backward, Catholic,



Connolly's Citizen Army outside ITGWU headquarters, Liberty Hall

bourgeois, partitionist bigots they were and mostly still are. In the North the Protestant working class had privileges over the Catholics in better chances of jobs and houses, etc., amidst permanent high unemployment. The Catholics were kept down.

But the marginal privileges of the Protestants — a better chance of a job amidst mass unemployment, for example — did not create the division. This was not the primary cause of it. To talk of it as being 'exploitation' of the Catholics is to falsify reality.

The Catholics were the worst off. But the Protestant workers, then and now, were also victims, living in slums and poverty. James Connolly wrote with terrible prophetic accuracy when, arguing that no Home Rule for any part of Ireland would be better than partition, he declared:

"...the betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South and would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements while it endured..."

Of course concern for the Protestant workers — who continue to play a reactionary role — cannot override support for the democratic rights of the Irish people as a whole or for the struggle of the Six County Catholics, the most direct victims of partition.

The only way forward for the Protestant work-

ing class lies within the framework of a united Ireland — and possibly within a wider British/Irish or European framework. But within this, and with these qualifications, we must, as socialists, as internationalists, and as working class democrats, be concerned for the maximum democratic rights for the Protestant people.

If we do not have a democratic programme — that is, advocate autonomy or federalism as the only democratic solution to the divisions and conflicts which pit the people who live in Ireland murderously against each other — then we rise no higher than the miserable partitionist Southern Irish bourgeoisie — which opposed and still opposes partition in words, and yet created and maintains a sectarian Catholic state. We rise no higher than the reflection within the ranks of the petty bourgeois nationalists (both left and right) of this bourgeoisie and the state it has created.

We must instead be consistent democrats.

## Part 2

Is it 'capitulation to imperialism' by way of surrender to the Protestants to be concerned with the democratic rights of the Protestant Irish people? No, it is not. Such concerns are in accord with our most basic socialist and democratic principles and an irreplaceable part of the programme of revolutionary international socialism. For example, a basic document of the Communist International said this:

"... the entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based primarily on bringing together the proletariat and working classes of all nations and countries for the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landowners and the bourgeoisie. For only such united action will ensure victory over capitalism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality of rights".

This refers to the relation of the workers of the oppressed nations with the workers of the imperialist countries. There is not even a hint in it of the notion that the workers in the imperialist countries are so corrupted by privilege that they can't be reached, or that they are so irrelevant that they can be ignored, bypassed or dismissed.

It applies, I believe, with all the greater force to the relationship we should strive to establish between the bitterly divided Protestant and Catholic sections of the working class in Ireland.

Our concern for democratic rights is, of course, primarily and immediately, concern for those to whom these are most denied, the oppressed. We must nevertheless on all questions of relations between nations, fragments of nations, and communities be, to quote Lenin again, 'consistent democrats'. The Protestants of Northern Ireland would be oppressed within a

**'During the last 11 years the Protestant workers have broken from the ruling-class-led bloc - to populist Paisleyite bigotry.'**

united Ireland which bore any resemblance to the Southern state.

Everything that has happened in Northern Ireland over the last 15 years refutes the idea that the Protestants are defined as a community only by 'pro-imperialism'. They are pro-British or define themselves simply as British, but that is not necessarily the same thing.

And in history they have been "pro-British" and supporters of the British state only on certain conditions. Look at the record.

The Presbyterians were discriminated against and oppressed until the end of the 18th century. Protestants were the leaders, organisers, and in Northern Ireland the backbone of the Irish Jacobins (the United Irishmen) and their uprising in 1798.

Even in the 19th and 20th century reactionary stage of their history Orangeists have felt themselves to have their own interests, and have frequently been rebellious against Britain's policy in Ireland. Often in the mid 19th century Orangemen threatened to 'kick the Queen's crown into the Boyne' — a reference to what they had helped do to the Catholic King James after the Whig revolution of 1688. They organised, armed and drilled to oppose British plans for Home Rule (albeit in alliance with a powerful British ruling class faction).

During the last 11 years the Protestant workers have largely broken from the long-lasting ruling class-led Protestant bloc — not, unfortunately, to socialist class consciousness, but to populist Paisleyite bigotry.

In the last decade the Protestant (mainly working class) masses have brought down three governments, organised powerful militias, and defeated the British government's entire strategy for Northern Ireland with a general strike in 1974.

Are the Protestants the 'basis' of British rule in Northern Ireland? Yes, in the sense that if they did not want it, it could not last long. But they have not been the basis of British strategy since

the fall of Stormont, and Britain had turned its face to the Southern bourgeoisie and the new Catholic middle class in Northern Ireland at least a decade earlier.

Britain no longer has any military or economic reason to hold on to Northern Ireland. It was British government pressures after 1964 that forced the effete bourgeois political elite in Northern Ireland to try to form links (1965-6) with the Southern state and begin feeble moves to reform the sectarian statelet.

It was this that encouraged the Catholic civil rights movement and at the same time triggered the Protestant backlash which culminated in the major pogrom attempts of August 1969 which put the troops on the streets and led for a while (until October 1969) to the internal secession, behind barricades of Catholic Derry and Catholic Belfast.

The British government's alternative to the old system of Protestant rule that it was forced to scrap in 1972 was the 'power-sharing executive' and a Council of Ireland, set up in late '73 and early '74.

Britain was then 'basing itself' heavily on the Southern Irish bourgeoisie and on a big section of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland, the majority of whom voted for the party which then expressed the joint interests of Britain, the Southern bourgeoisie and the middle class Catholics — the SDLP.

They were to share power with a section of the Protestants led by Brian Faulkner, isolating and politically ghettoising (they hoped) the irreconcilable Protestant supremacists. The Protestant general strike of 1974 brought the whole strategy crashing down.

Were the Protestants in 1974 acting as tools of Britain — or, as in 1912, of a section of the British ruling class — against the rest of the Irish people? No, they were not, neither in their intentions nor objectively. In fact they acted against British interests and against British government policy, shattering it. And in the light of this what sense does it make to talk, as many comrades do, as if 'Catholic' means anti-imperial-

ist or Protestant pro-imperialist? The reality is much more complex than that.

If to be anti-imperialist is to be against the British government and its policies for Ireland, and to use 'revolutionary' methods (including working class methods, in a reactionary cause), then the Northern Ireland Protestants have been the most potent 'anti-imperialist' force in Ireland.

It is the Protestants who so far have defeated every British effort to collaborate with the Irish bourgeoisie in rearranging the mess it created in 1920.

The tragedy, of course, is that their purpose has been to restore their sectarian supremacy within the artificial Six County state. They are concerned not with 'imperialism' but with their own interests as they see them — that is, with their relations with the Irish Catholics.

Britain would readily agree to a united Ireland tomorrow if enough Northern Ireland Protestants would.

**'The attitude of the Protestants is the central problem. Either they will be conciliated in some way, or they must be subjugated and maybe driven out...'**

Britain is not 'using' the Protestants now against the rest of the Irish people as a section of the British ruling class used them 70 years ago.

Britain's crime is that it chooses to hold the ring, maintaining the partition settlement and to beat down the Catholics.

To picture the Northern Ireland Protestants (or any comparable community) in one-dimensional terms as just politically 'pro-imperialist' is therefore radically to falsify reality and adopt attitudes alien to our socialist programme. It is to relate to the problems

that Ireland's history has created for the working class in Ireland, and for socialists in Britain, through crude ideological spectacles, sealing ourselves off from the realities of Irish politics by the use of an inadequate and misleading political tag. It is a tag which — if we are talking about their rights as a distinct community — is a completely irrelevant one.

Like the Irish Republicans, Tony Richardson tries to define one million Protestants out of existence. The Protestants? Why they are just British imperialism in Ireland; there is just imperialism and anti-imperialism and nothing else need concern us. The magic words 'pro-imperialist' are pronounced and that settles it. Let's move on.

But it doesn't settle it. The attitude of the Protestants is the central problem, reflecting as it does the existence of a distinct community.

Either the Protestants will be conciliated in some way, or they must be coerced, subjugated, conquered and maybe driven out.

Who will conquer them? It is inconceivable to me that we should advocate it, even if we thought it possible.

Does Tony Richardson advocate it? That's what's implied by what he writes (and also by the present policy of the Provisional IRA, not to speak of the 'socialist' INLA).

But this is a recipe for a Lebanon-style civil war, which would lead to Catholic-Protestant mass slaughter, mass population shifts, and almost certainly repartition of Ireland into 'pure' Orange and Green segments. Britain could most likely keep whatever links it wanted with the resultant Protestant area. Nothing conceivably progressive or 'anti-imperialist' could come from such a development. Nothing.

No-one proposes a confessional state for Ireland. But I can think of one thing worse than the old confessional state in Lebanon — what existed there when the system broke down in communal civil war.

Yet this is the only road the Republicans' new policy can lead them

to — an attempt to subjugate the Protestants that can only end in bloody repartition. By way of a trite and 'political' labelling, the Provisionals have now, I believe, broken with Republicanism.

**'Of course we should sympathise with the dilemmas of the Northern Republicans'**

Over nearly 200 years there have been many different Republicanisms in Irish history. But from the Protestant-led Jacobins whose very name, United Irishmen, summed up their programme to 'unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter under the common name of Irishman', to Patrick Pearse, joint leader of the 1916 Rising who (foolishly!) welcomed the arming of the Protestants in 1914 as 'guns in the hands of Irishmen', central to Republicanism has been the task of uniting the Irish people.

Pearse rejected any notion of coercing the Northern Protestants. So, from realism as much as from Republican doctrine, did most of those who led the 1919-21 Irish war of independence.

Democratic Republicanism is compatible with socialism. Explicitly Catholic 'Republicanism' is not compatible with socialism, not even when it justifies itself with rhetoric about imperialism and justifies its attitude to the Protestants by calling them pro-imperialist. More than that: Catholic nationalism is the opposite of Tone's Republicanism.

Of course we should understand and sympathise with the dilemmas of the often subjectively socialist Northern Republicans. They are locked into the Six County bearpit, with little serious support in the South, where they did not even try to contest the recent election. The British working class movement has remained hostile or indifferent. They know that Protestant/Catholic unity is not theirs to create.

They face the bitter sectarian bigotry of the Protestants — especially of the Protestant workers. They know it is the Protestants who stand in the way of British withdrawal and a united Ireland, to which Britain long ago agreed in principle.

Implicit in their position for a long time, as in Fianna Fail's in the South, has been the demand that Britain coerce the Protestants into a united Ireland.

They have made no progress for eleven years.

Their recent Northern Ireland election success?

They got the same proportion of the Catholic vote in the late 1950s and then could also elect a couple of (abstentionist) deputies to the Dail. The election success is anyway irrelevant for the basic problem of relations between the communities. Sinn Fein advance has been against the Catholic SDLP and at its expense. It does not diminish the communal polarisation, it increases it.

These are the reasons why partitionist and 'two Irelands' policies have entered the political soul of Northern Republicanism. For that is what their proposals for dealing with the Protestant Irish minority implies — two Irelands, Catholic and Protestant, "anti-imperialist" and "pro-imperialist". Only one of them has rights as a community or a nation, and the other must submit. There can be no compromises, no conciliation or accommodation of the minority. If they don't submit they must be conquered.

## **'Partitionist and 'two Irelands' policies have entered the political soul of Northern Republicanism'**

Often in history political actions produce results the opposite of

those intended. The student civil rights activists in 1968-9 did not set out to produce the war that soon developed in Northern Ireland — they wanted reform and a liberal Northern Ireland, and some wanted Protestant/Catholic working class unity to fight for socialism. But their actions helped trigger events which were shaped by communal animosities and the unresolved national question: their intentions counted for nothing. The Provo policy now — whatever their desires and hopes — is a recipe for sectarian civil war which would, inevitably, culminate in repartition and the final hardening-out of two fully distinct Irelands.

The mass graves resulting from mutual communal slaughter by sections of the Irish people would mark the historic end to the great dream and goal of Irish Republicanism — which Irish and other socialists can proudly pick up — to wipe out sectarianism and foreign domination in Ireland, and to unite the Irish people.

It is no service to the Republicans, or to the Catholic or Protestant people of Northern Ireland, for us to ignore the implications of the Republicans' position, or to praise the 'social' turn when it goes together with a sectarian turn which is fundamentally reactionary and anti-Republican.

That the Catholics' current struggle is just does not mean that it is socialist, or that we can gloss over the question of the Protestants' democratic rights by saying it will be solved by the socialism allegedly implicit in the Catholics' struggle.

Socialism is not implicit in the Catholics' struggle; nor is it what many on the populist left in Britain and Ireland imagine it to be, a potential West European Cuba.

Ireland, North and South, is an advanced bourgeois society. In the EEC the 26 Counties has political equality with, and the same formal weight as, Britain — and on issues like the Common Agricultural Policy it opposes Britain.

The only anti-imperialist programme for



Ireland is an anti-capitalist programme and that means a working class programme. It thus requires the unity of the working class, or of a big majority of it.

That unity will not be achieved just by preaching its advantages: the Catholic-Protestant antagonism is, and perhaps already was even before 1968-9, too deep and bloody. The approach of preaching unity — essentially that of Militant — has no purchase on reality, and less now than at the beginning of the present cycle, when in 1970 a revolutionary socialist candidate could get 9000 votes in Derry.

Neither the fantastic — and reactionary — prospect of subjugating the Protestants, nor bald appeals for working-class unity (and never mind about the 'constitutional questions' which have convulsed Northern Ireland for so long) are conceivably useful or reasonable — we need a democratic programme for resolving the Catholic-Protestant antagonism. That is the only possible basis on which we can even begin to build working-class unity, or an Irish socialist movement that can hope to unite workers across the communal divide.

The anti-imperialism of the Provos and of the Northern Ireland Catholics is deeply felt, but limited by their politics; by their traditional focus on hostility to Britain, confusing colonialism with imperialism; by the traditional Republican fetish of 'physical force'; by the position of the Northern Ireland Catholic community in Ireland as a whole; and centrally by the Catholics' relationship to the Northern Ireland Protestant community.

**'The only anti-imperialist programme in Ireland is a working-class programme. It requires the unity of the working class...'**

The populist socialism of the Provos and INLA, which has militarist elitism at its core and assumes that the Protestant Irish proletariat can be ignored or coerced, is in no way a working class policy.

The division in the Irish working class simply rules out the possibility of a socialist strategy being developed out of the present military struggle. Talk of 'permanent revolution' is just a self-consoling way of ignoring the realities, and in Ireland it serves to make most 'Trotskyists' practically indistinguishable from the nationalists. In Britain too it has helped to shift the bulk of the revolutionary left to accepting the crudest 'Catholic nationalism'.

The notion that there can be Irish socialism created or initiated by a military formation against the probably armed opposition ('pro-imperialist' opposition, if you like) of over a quarter of the Irish working class, is a strange one for a Marxist to hold.

Tony Richardson (and other comrades) not long ago used to advocate for Northern Ireland a united working-class militia based on the trades unions there. This is an attractive idea, but it is an idle fantasy, because the sectarian division goes deep also in the unions. The mass UDA of 1972 would have had good claim to being the 'trade union militia' better than any other that is likely to emerge, anyway.

What does that position have in common with Tony Richardson's present position, and his current — diametrically opposite — attitude to the Protestants? Everything. For in neither case does he base himself on a concrete picture of Northern Ireland reality and its problems and possibilities.

In his attitude to the Protestants he has swung over from one side of the political spectrum to the other without ever touching hard ground.

Jim Denham SO 116) is therefore absolutely right about Tony Richardson's method — dogmatic socialist phrasemongering in form, and in content uncritical (though unintentional) acceptance of a sort of narrowed-down Irish Catholic nationalism.

Whereas Marxists must try to understand reality, the better to equip our class and ourselves to change it, the phrasemonger settles for satisfying words which mirror his emotions and serve to seal him

**'We should support the Catholics.  
..We should fight for a Socialist United States of Europe; for a workers' republic in Ireland; for a democratic settlement between Catholics and Protestants, details to be negotiated...'**

off from the real problems. And if you do not try to think things through concretely, and settle instead for hollow 'Marxist' phrases, the real politics which pile up behind the barriers of dead phrases will inevitably come from random impressions, emotional attractions and repulsions, and from empirical adaptation to powerful forces operating in the given situation. You only package emotions, wishes, fantasies about Northern Ireland in the acceptable form of familiar ideas (permanent revolution, imperialism/anti-imperialism, 'socialism is the only solution', etc).

With this method the facts can be disturbing, and to think through implications would risk collapsing the whole fantastic structure of words. You end up not with Marxism but with a sort

of kitsch 'Trotskyism'.

Of course none of this proves that I am right about anything. I think it shows that it would have to be an accident if Tony Richardson is right about Ireland.

We should support the Catholics for the justice of their cause and because of the fundamentally reactionary character of Orange politics and of the partition of Ireland. We should fight for a Socialist United States of Europe; for a workers' republic in Ireland; for unconditional withdrawal of the British Army; for a united Ireland; and within that for a democratic settlement between Catholics and Protestants, to include autonomy for the heartlands of the Protestant community, details of such a system to be negotiated.

But if we indulge in vicarious romantic Irish nationalism, private fantasies about 'permanent revolution', or pretences that the Irish socialist revolution is in the offing, then it will only hinder us — as the various Irish solidarity movements have been hindered for over a decade — from winning that support in the British labour movement for the Catholics which it is our responsibility to win.

Finally, an analogy. Talking to US socialists in the early '30s, Trotsky insisted on brutal honesty about the racism of the American workers.

To the blacks, said Trotsky, "the American workers are hangmen".

But he did not therefore advocate that the socialists turn their backs on the 'pro-imperialist' sections of our class. Hangmen they were; but they were still our class. His programme was class unity — and, immediately, defence of the most oppressed against all the hangmen, including the working class hangmen.

And, after all, when we discuss the Northern Ireland Protestants, we are talking about a big section of our own class — and of not much less than a quarter of all the people who live in Ireland! Our starting point has to be James Connolly's dictum against all abstract nationalism — "Ireland apart from her people means nothing to me".



# Lying pro-English rubbish

I MUST say I love these SO "discussions" that begin with a torrent of words from John O'Mahony and then urge readers to "express themselves as succinctly as possible". What a pity that never seems to apply to O'Mahony himself! Still, I suppose there is a good side to that in terms of political clarity since the more he writes the worse he gets.

To begin with comrade O'Mahony should be informed that you can only accuse people of libel if what they say is untrue. Unfortunately for O'Mahony the points made by Tony Richardson (SO115) are admirably proved by his own article on "The Problem of the Protestants". Maybe O'Mahony should consider applying his views on terrorism (see the articles on the Chelsea and Ballykelly bombings) to his own bombastic verbal terrorism.

But these are secondary matters. There are, politically, a number of significant points to be drawn from his latest outpourings.

Firstly, we have the curiously myopic view of the Irish people which O'Mahony seeks to foist on Socialist Organiser. I can hardly believe that it is a coincidence that all the blood and thunder is directed against the republicans and the regime in the South while imperialism and the Protestant reactionaries get a soft ride.

For example, according to O'Mahony, the INLA are "sectarian assassins" and are "engaged in a sectarian binge". The IRA were denounced in equally "yellow press" language after the Chelsea bombing for "indiscriminately" "cutting a swathe" through civilians. Similarly, in the South we have "backward, Catholic, bourgeois partitionist bigots".

But in the North? Well, for O'Mahony the virulently pro-imperialist Protestant population who have organised endless pogroms against the minority Catholic population — not least in 1968-9 against their demands for civil rights — are certainly deserving of a slap on the wrist. "It is

true that they have played a bad role in modern Irish history", he says. Note, comrades, "a bad role"!

O'Mahony is truly the master of understatement. In pubs all round Belfast he would have ex-B Specials rolling in the aisles. But let us go on.

"The Protestants had privileges over the Catholics in better chances of jobs and houses amidst permanent higher unemployment", O'Mahony informs us. Obviously the point about unemployment is to show, as he attempts again later, that these were no real privileges. All nice mild stuff, isn't it?

Not a patch on the vitriolic hatred which pours from O'Mahony's pen when he is dealing with the petty bourgeois nationalist movement. Obviously, the Shankhill butchers, like the rest of the Unionists "played a bad role". So what we have is, in practice, apologetics when we talk about the Protestant community and denunciations for the "priest-ridden" Catholic community — O'Mahony's phrase, not mine!

But O'Mahony is even more outrageous in his attempts to rationalise a defence of the Protestant community when he is playing games with history. According to O'Mahony "They are a community put down in Ireland mainly by free immigration from England and Scotland and, much less importantly, by official British colonisation".

This, comrades, is lying, pro-English rubbish!

How, with this "overview" does O'Mahony explain the rebellion of 1641 against the forcible plantation of Ulster by Scots and English Protestants? How does he explain Cromwell's invasion and the burning of Drogheda? The driving of the resident population south and westwards to Connacht? The almost total redistribution

## Peter Flack, SO 119

of lands in the North and Midlands of Ireland in that period? The imposition of reactionary English laws designed to exclude all Catholics from holding public office? The years of military rule? Did you, by any chance, forget these comrade O'Mahony?

Of course, as always, comrade O'Mahony is diplomatically coy on such issues. "Lands were taken in a series of confiscations" he tells us, conveniently removing the context. But in order to hide the real course of events he also has to fiddle with his dates.

The English "conquest" of Ireland is carefully placed in the 1590s. In reality, as he well knows, this marked the emergence of a conscious policy of colonisation only — unless O'Mahony thinks that it was James I and Charles I who violently imposed the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity in Ireland. The conquest took place in the 1640s as part of a Protestant crusade against Catholic Ireland and only at that stage took the form of the military suppression of the Irish people (or maybe O'Mahony also has a new definition of conquest).

With such a record of historical accuracy at hand it is hardly surprising, then, that O'Mahony should also "forget" to point out that the opposition to Cromwell came not only from the native population but also from the Anglo-Irish free settler population, many of them protestants, who were also driven from the land!

Still, what is a little truth among friends? Having rewritten the actual history of Ireland, O'Mahony arrogantly boasts "That is the outline of the dominant element in the historical picture". If O'Mahony were a painter he would produce fakes!

So, let us look at his glib

panorama of recent events, and the more modern parts of his catalogue of historical sleight of hand. We are told, with reference to the Protestant community, "what bound them to England and the ruling class arose in the first place from the fact and the awareness that they were different, that their part of Ireland was more advanced and from their feeling of being threatened".

You can almost see Ian Smith reading this sort of rubbish and feeling better. But the situation is worse, because O'Mahony's rationale for Protestant reaction goes further. For we have an almost sympathetic presentation of their "opposition to being incorporated as a minority in a largely agrarian, backward and priest-ridden Catholic bourgeois state." Clearly, for O'Mahony, Protestant imperialist enclaves are eminently superior to Catholic bourgeois states!

In any case, what we get is certainly a novel view of Ulster Unionism. Unfortunately for O'Mahony, Bonar Law, the then Conservative leader was somewhat more honest when he addressed the massed unionists on April 9, 1912 at Balmoral, a suburb of Belfast. "Once again you hold the pass," he informed them. "The pass for the Empire".

Tell me, comrade O'Mahony, when the audience clapped and cheered this reactionary bilge were they expressing their noble hostility to Catholic "backwardness" or their prostrate, reactionary pro-imperialism? Were the Ulster Volunteers a militant expression of advanced social relations or a reactionary expression of the distorted, combined and uneven development imposed on Ireland by imperialism?

Inevitably, the endgame of this ludicrous series of political charades sinks to the absolute depths. "The way forward for the Protestant working class is within the framework of a united Ireland —

**'Apologetics for the Protestant community... denunciations for the "priest-ridden" Catholic community...'**

and possibly within a wider British/Irish or European framework". What the hell is he talking about? What is a "wider British/Irish or European framework"? A new expanded United Kingdom? A bourgeois regroupment through the EEC?

The only such framework

that I know of in the lexicon of revolutionary Marxism is the Socialist United States of Europe. But then such concepts would never enter into the thoughts of one so elevated as comrade O'Mahony. He is after all "a working class democrat" and a "consistent democrat".

So, inevitably all that we get are demands for a democratic programme which begins from the "maximum democratic rights for the Protestant community" in the form of federal autonomy.

Comrade O'Mahony, you should try thinking

about the revolutionary tasks in Ireland in terms of the theory of permanent revolution. Then perhaps you could avoid falling into what Tony Gard correctly described in SO 118 as "a reactionary divisive notion which has no part in the Marxist programme."

## Are we for class unity?

**Bruce  
Robinson, SO  
120**

PETER Flack in his letter in Socialist Organiser no.119 accuses John O'Mahony of "lying" and rewriting the history of Ireland. This seems slightly imprudent if we examine more closely some of the assertions that Peter Flack makes.

He asserts that British conquest in Ireland remained only 'a conscious policy' until the 1640s, and had not taken place in the 1590s. In fact, Elizabeth I, motivated by a fear of the Spanish using Ireland as a stepping stone in war against England (5,000 Spanish soldiers did in fact land in 1601) destroyed the last bastions of the Irish chiefs, the O'Neills, in Ulster, by 1602.

Peter Flack also ridicules the idea that "it was James I and Charles I who violently imposed the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity in Ireland". Engels, in notes for his history of Ireland, states the following:

"1603: ... Elizabeth died. All Ireland was subjugated for the first time.

"James I: Everybody expected him to restore the Catholic religion... James however demanded that all officials, barristers and graduates of universities gave the Oath of Supremacy, and also restored the Act of Uniformity. He at once purged the Dublin Council of Catholics".

The religious beliefs were in fact secondary to the financial and political interests of the Crown.

In the reign of Charles I an Irish equivalent of Star Chamber was set up to implement the Oath of Supremacy and "to bring the people here to a conformity in religion and in the way to that to raise perhaps a good revenue to the Crown".

Perhaps most importantly for the subject at issue, Flack misdates the plantation of Ulster, which in fact took place from 1608 under James I. He seized 800,000 acres in six of the nine counties of Ulster — not

including Down and Antrim, the counties which now have the largest Protestant majority. These were also colonised, but not under the compulsion of the British crown.

None of this would be worth bringing to readers' notice if not for accusations of 'rewriting history' and so on. Nobody in this discussion disputes that the British conquest and rule in Ireland was brutal, and is maintained by repression today.

All of the argument in Peter Flack's letter is aimed at proving that the Protestant population is 'pro-imperialist', a settler population like that in Rhodesia, and inhabits an 'imperialist enclave' — though they settled there before imperialism in the Marxist sense existed!

This raises a few questions. Firstly, is there a Protestant working class? Yes — though the latter never acknowledges this.

Are we in favour of uniting the Protestant and Catholic workers in Ireland, while recognising that at present this is not possible?

The answer must be yes, though Peter Flack's letter strongly implies that we can simply consign the Protestants to the 'dustbin of history' or the next boat to Stranraer, as 'pro-imperialist'. This is merely a policy of Catholic nationalism carried to its logical conclusion.

Are we in favour of measures to promote class unity, while making no compromises on the question of partition, which underlies the present disunity? Again

the answer must be yes.

The Provisionals' recognition of federalism until recently expressed this wish. We can have a fruitful discussion on whether federalism is the best means of ensuring the Protestants' rights within a united Ireland, but it is indisputable that it is both desirable and permissible for Marxists to favour such measures as promote Protestant/Catholic class unity and allow the Protestants rights within the framework of a united Ireland.

One final plea: we should be able to discuss this without accusations of "lying" (unjustified, as I have shown), being "pro-English", etc., and keeping to the political points of the discussion. Demagoguery can only obscure the real issues under discussion.

## How the Protestants came to Ireland

**Jo Quigley  
SO 121**

AS Peter Flack's letter (SO 119, February 10) consists mostly of intemperate abuse it is difficult to find anything in it sufficiently coherent to engage with. Ironically, however, the issue that appears to excite him most is one where there is least dissension amongst those seriously engaged in the study of Irish history.

Whatever their many other differences the liberal Kee, the Stalinist Jackson, the Catholic one-time Unionist Buckland and the modern American historian D.W. Miller all agree the manner and consequences of early 17th Century emigration to Ulster.

Following the defeat and flight of the clan chiefs O'Neill and O'Donnell in 1607 the Government of James I encouraged settlement of their confiscated

lands. Land was offered by the Crown to under-takers in lots of 2,000; 1,000 and 500 acres on condition that they let it to English and Scottish tenants only.

Letting to the dispossessed native Irish was prohibited. This condition was not observed. Not recruiting sufficient adventurers from England the new owners let their land for rent to the native Irish. Thus, instead of creating as English policy intended 'compact islands of civility' British settlers were scattered throughout a population still predominantly Gaelic and Catholic.

The Corporation of London was given Coleraine to settle by James I. They renamed it Londonderry and by 1624 had 4,000 native tenants when they should have had none. Six years later a financially hard pressed King Charles I tried to raise money by fining the Corporation for violating the conditions of the settlement.

The free or private immigration that came to Ulster after 1607 was different in

quality and quantity. Overwhelmingly recruited from the Western Scottish lowlands, they settled in Antrim and Down and to a much lesser extent in Monaghan.

Unlike the English who were largely content to live off rent, the Scottish farmers sunk their own labour and capital into tillage and created in Antrim and Down a kind of extension of the Scottish lowlands.

Subsequent attempts by the native Irish to recover their lost lands were predictably met by further repression and confiscations. But the uneven distribution of the Protestant population of the North has its roots in these two forms of colonisation. And the pattern persists to this day.

In the areas of Crown directed settlement, Donegal and Cavan, Catholics constitute a huge majority, while in Armagh and Londonderry Protestants have a bare majority and fall a little short of one in Fermanagh and Tyrone.

In the areas of free immi-

gration from the Scottish lowlands on the other hand the pattern is quite different. Antrim today is still 80% Protestant and Down 68%.

Flack's sneering and shallow gibe about Ian Smith is put in its place when we remember that it was from these Scottish settlers on Ulster's eastern seaboard that the United Irishmen were to find their staunchest supporters.

Yet, as I have already said, none of this is disputed by moderately informed people. What queer theory of Flack's is threatened by exposure to such historical data one can only speculate upon.

Readers of your paper will no doubt draw their own conclusions about the value of a theory based on historical howlers that should make a school student blush.

## 1640s to 1983

**Martin  
Thomas SO121**

SOME people on the Irish and British left have argued that the Protestants in Northern Ireland should be seen as a "colon" population, similar to the European settlers in colonial Algeria.

From this assessment clear conclusions follow. Catholic/Protestant workers' unity on any mass scale is not just difficult to achieve, but utopian. Mass emigration by the Protestants is, if not recommended, at least realistically an acceptable solution to the present conflict.

Peter Flack (letters, no. 119) states no clear general theory, but the drift of his account of Irish history seems to be towards the "colon" view.

In the 1640s, he tells us, the English conquest "took place as part of a Protestant crusade against Catholic Ireland".

The next stopping point is 1912, with these same Protestants "holding the pass for the Empire". Then we flash forward to 1983, and the Protestants — much the same people as conducted the "crusade against Catholic Ireland" in the 1640s, apparently — constitute an "imperialist enclave".

Ireland, in short, is after all "two nations" — only one of these, the Protestant nation, is a bad nation.

The account is so selective as to be completely distorted. "A Protestant crusade against Catholic Ireland" is an odd, and not very materialist, explanation of the 1641-49 war. It started with a rising of the (Catholic) native-Irish, and then criss-crossed with the English civil war.

The Catholics among the Anglo-Irish, and at times

sections of the Protestant Anglo-Irish landowners, sided with the King. The Ulster Scots generally sided with Parliament. And this conflict was interlaced with the drive of the rising English bourgeoisie to subjugate what they saw as the wild, alien race of the native-Irish, and to make sure that Ireland could not be a base for foreign invasion.

Peter Flack passes without mention over the birth of Irish nationalism and Republicanism in the late 18th Century — a period which surely shows that we cannot simply read history backwards in a straight line to identify today's Protestant community with Cromwell's soldiers of the 1640s.

Republicanism originated as the democratic left wing of the mainly Protestant/aristocratic Irish nationalism of the late 18th Century "patriot" movement. For a period it was so strong that until June 1797 the Orange Order could not hold meetings in Protestant Belfast.

The most advanced section of the Protestant bourgeoisie formulated the programme, "To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter", and linked up with the Catholic masses.

Such also has been the programme of Catholic-led

Irish Republicanism, since in the 1840s it separated itself off from the narrow, conservative 'Catholic nationalism' of O'Connell.

Such again was the Republican element that the Irish Socialists led by James Connolly integrated into their social programme: "In their movement", they hoped, "the North and South will again clasp hands, again will it be demonstrated, as in '98, that the pressure of a common exploitation can make enthusiastic rebels out of a Protestant working class, earnest champions of civil and religious liberty out of Catholics, and out of both a united social democracy."

The Republicans and Socialists held these views not because they were infected with 'lying, pro-English rubbish', but because they saw that the Protestants were not a mere clique of exploiters superimposed on the masses of Ireland — that neither Catholic nor Protestant working people could be free unless both could unite in a fight for liberation.

To evade the defence of the present Catholic revolt in the name of these general aims would be shameful. But it is no less shameful to let our thinking be so dominated by the difficulties and limits of that revolt that we dismiss, abandon, or try to define out of existence the problem of conciliating and winning unity with the Protestants.

# Permanent Revolution is the answer

**Martin  
Collins  
SO 120**

SOCIALIST Organiser no.116 continues the discussion on the relevance of Trotskyist ideas in an Irish context. Permanent revolution has never been something in the revolutionary cookbook for which the peasantry was the main ingredient, but a means of looking at how to make a revolution in countries where capitalism had thoroughly distorted any 'natural' or 'national' economic development.

Trotsky, unlike John O'Mahony, ruled out any purely democratic programme for dealing with questions of national independence, saying instead that you needed a socialist pro-

gramme that fought national rulers at the same time as foreign ones.

Is this not applicable to Southern Ireland today? Surely when the Fitzgerald government is doing its best to carry out the kind of austerity offensive that other European governments have; is doing a deal with the British over 'condominium' status which would exclude any independence that the South has left; putting anti-abortion laws into the constitution and being dragged into the NATO alliance, it is more than confirmed. Is it really just phrasemongering to suggest you need a socialist programme to deal with these issues?

Ireland is not an advanced capitalist country, but one dominated in every aspect of economic and political life by imperialism.

The big problem for the Irish working class is not the fears of

**'Ireland is not an advanced Capitalist country, but one dominated in every aspect of economic and political life by imperialism... Loyalist workers will only break from their bosses when the working class as a whole looks like winning...'**

Protestants of clerical reaction, which threatens all workers, but the division of the working class into two separate reactionary states. It is that unity that can be created by a party fighting for a socialist programme throughout the 32 counties.

Loyalist workers will only break from their bosses when

the working class as a whole looks like it stands a chance of winning and when the unity of the British ruling class which gives the Unionist bosses their backing is under threat.

These are not the bizarre conclusions of the so-called Trotskyist sects. This is the only possible way to win in Ireland.

# The purpose of revolution is not national development, but workers' interests

Clive Bradley  
SO 125

MARTIN Collins (SO 120) argues that Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is applicable to Ireland today. "Permanent revolution has never been something in the revolutionary cookbook for which the peasantry was the main ingredient, but a means of looking at how to make a revolution in countries where capitalism had thoroughly distorted any 'natural' or 'national' economic development."

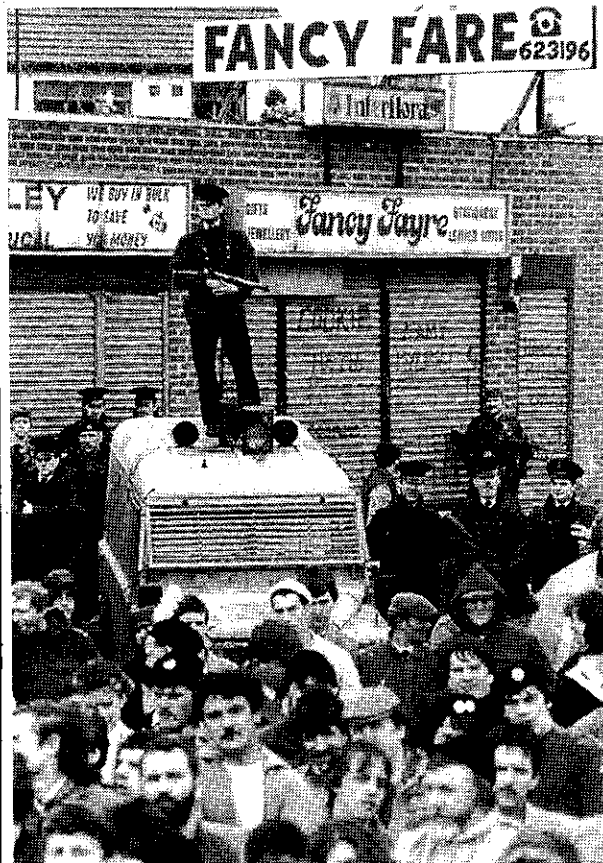
A strategy based on such an analysis is "the only possible way to win in Ireland."

This whole frame of reference is, I think, wrong, scholastic, and a vulgarisation of Trotsky's theory. If all that comrade Collins is saying is that the solution to the national and social problems facing Irish workers is a working class solution — the seizure of power by the working class, then, of course, there can be no disagreement.

Whilst personally I do not think that it is necessarily true that a united Ireland can only be achieved on a socialist basis, a capitalist Ireland is clearly not something to which socialists limit the aim of their struggle.

But comrade Collins is not merely saying this. He is further claiming a) that the theory of permanent revolution applies to Ireland, and b) that the theory of permanent revolution is to do with strategy in 'distorted' economies.

First, the theory of permanent revolution was related to countries in which the bulk of the population were peasants, i.e. in its original formulation to Russia. Trotsky's analysis was that the combined contradictions created by the development of capitalist social relations and the crisis of pre-capitalist agriculture (or at any rate the crisis created by the transition to, not the fully fledged develop-



RUC in action in Belfast

ment of, capitalist agriculture), generated social tensions in which the working class was placed at the heart of the class struggle as a whole, and no other class would be able to effectively deal with, overthrow, Tsarism.

This did not mean that the coming revolution was simply 'socialist'; on the contrary, that the coming revolution was a bourgeois revolution that the bourgeoisie was not capable of carrying out, and that once in power, the working class would have to 'uninterruptedly' go further than the 'bourgeois' stage. It also did not mean that the peasantry was irrelevant — Trotsky and Lenin entirely agreed on the necessity of an alliance of proletariat and peasantry. The difference was that for Trotsky the working class would be dominant in the alliance and 'appear before the peasantry as its liberators'.

The dynamics of rural revolt were central to Trotsky's perspective.

In Ireland, on the other hand, there is no land

question — the crisis of agriculture is a crisis of capitalist agriculture. The same combination of social contradictions simply do not exist.

So whilst I would agree with comrade Collins that what is required in Ireland is working class revolution — there is nothing 'permanent' or uninterrupted about this revolution, in the sense that Trotsky understood such a perspective.

To insist that there is, is to ignore the real content of Trotsky's theory — his actual analysis of social relations — and substitute Militant-type platitudes about 'only socialism...'

Second, Trotsky's theory had nothing to do with the 'un-natural' or (worse) 'un-national' character of capitalist development in Russia. His argument was that the combined and uneven development of capitalism internationally (which requires no utopian judgements in terms of how 'natural' or 'national' it is), created particular conditions in which capitalism in Russia, and so the working class in Russia, was inex-

tricably linked to capitalism internationally, determining both the potential of the working class power in Russia and the necessary perspective for maintaining it.

The purpose of workers' revolution in backward capitalist countries is not to secure 'national development', but — along with revolution in other countries — to secure workers' interests.

My objection to comrade Collins' argument is not therefore an objection to a perspective of united working class struggle — that is what the debate in SO is about — but an objection to a method that abandons actual analysis for a set of ritualistic assertions.

Of course — this is not in dispute — the national question remains central to the class struggle in Ireland. Of course this indicates a certain incompleteness of the bourgeois revolution in Ireland. Of course what we need is socialist revolution. But these three 'of courses' do not amount to the basis for talk of 'permanent revolution'.

**'The problem of the border is a problem for the working class; its abolition does not constitute a 'bourgeois revolution'...'**

The national question in Ireland is historically specific and exists in the context of a capitalist economy (in which certainly the working class has been divided and oppressed by British imperialism), in which there is no land question, no mass of peasants. The problem of the border is a problem for the working class; its abolition does not constitute a 'bourgeois revolution' in any meaningful sense.

We cannot derive socialist strategy from timeless recitation of a few misunderstood elements of Trotskyist theory.

# Britain stays in Ireland to survive

**Mike Wall  
(Irish  
Freedom  
Movement)  
SO123**

**SOCIALIST** Organiser readers have recently been served a mass of different confused ideas about the Loyalist working class. Two long articles by John O'Mahony formed the centre-piece of debate.

His line is a development of the position he held last year, when he issued the familiar radical left calls for working class unity in the Six Counties. Now he has found a barrier to this unity.

The Protestants are a distinct community. (SO 118).

O'Mahony's response to this discovery is to advocate 'autonomy' for the Loyalists 'within the framework of a united Ireland'. Looking into the future, he brings up a point held dear by those who justify the continued partition of Ireland.

"The Protestants of Northern Ireland would be oppressed within a united Ireland which bore any resemblance to the Southern state." (SO119).

O'Mahony expresses little concern for the Irish nationalists who are suffering today at the hands of British oppression. Nor does he see the contradiction in presuming that a united Ireland could resemble the Southern state. The Twenty-Six Counties set-up is as much a creation of partition as the Six Counties. The backward nature of the society is primarily caused by Britain's oppression of Ireland.

As a 'consistent democrat', O'Mahony follows through the logic of his position. He wants a new form of partition.

"I think that the best unit for federalism would be the four counties where a very big majority is Protestant." (SO 118).

How this plan can be 'compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people', O'Mahony fails to explain. His conclusions stem from a failure to understand the position of Loyalist work-

ers. He argues that Britain stays in Ireland only because the Protestants want them to, and denies that the Loyalists are a tool of British imperialism.

It is true that Loyalists act as they see it will best defend their own interests — not because they are pro-British for its own sake. But this is the limit of O'Mahony's understanding. He treats Loyalist behaviour as comprehensible in its own terms — the Protestants are different — that's all.

O'Mahony fails to see the material basis for Loyalism. The Loyalist working class is the creation of British imperialism in Ireland — a community built up and sustained on the distorted labour market which operates in the Six Counties.

'Socialists' who advocate class unity or autonomy as solutions to the problem of the Protestants are at the same time declaring their

## 'The loyalist working class is the creation of British imperialism in Ireland...'

refusal to oppose British imperialism consistently.

The defeat of Britain is a precondition for any form of unity or co-operation between all workers in Ireland. Britain's defeat would remove the basis for O'Mahony's problem Protestants.

O'Mahony denies that Irish freedom would be a massive defeat for Britain. For him, Britain stays in Ireland because the Protestants want it to. But for Britain to pull out of the Six Counties would be like pulling out of Yorkshire or Kent. Impossible! Britain's oppression of Ireland is no accidental policy. It is a central feature of the very existence of British imper-

ialism.

Britain uses the Loyalists to justify its oppression. The interests of the Loyalists coincide with British imperialism. Britain holds onto Ireland. The Loyalists keep their privileged social position.

This combination of interests is the key to understanding Loyalist 'opposition' to Britain. The UDA once briefly declared war on the British Army. But this was the opposite of an anti-imperialist action. Like the UWC strike, it was an attempt to strengthen British rule by reacting to situations where Britain wasn't doing quite enough to keep the nationalists down.

Loyalism is a product of Britain's rule in Ireland. Britain stays to survive — not because of sympathy for Orangemen and DUP voters.

At the end of his articles, after several thousand words, O'Mahony adds a touchingly 'non-sectarian' after-thought.

"Of course, none of this proves I am right about anything." (SO 119).

This is O'Mahony's only statement that some SO supporters agree with. Many have opposed his views. Some have balked at 'autonomy' and have wanted to retain a belief in class unity. Others have emphasised the need to support Irish unity and the rights of the nationalists — without confronting O'Mahony's views on the Protestants.

But only a few SO supporters are beginning to realise why O'Mahony is promoting his reactionary arguments. The significance of the debate is that it shows SO making its peace with the labour bureaucracy — a process which can be seen right through the pages of SO.

As the leading lights of SO adapt more and more to the British state, the need arises to destroy what remnants of principled support for Irish freedom remain within the grouping. O'Mahony's concern with the imagined rights of the Loyalist working class is only an attempt to paint a socialist gloss on a theory which is pro-imperialist through and through.

# No to class unity

**Alistair Todd  
SO 133**

John O'Mahony's epic 'Ireland — which way forward?' attempted yet again to defend one of the British left's most venerable sacred cows, the peculiar idea that it is possible to unite Catholic and Protestant workers in the Six Counties around 'bread and butter issues', a notion dismissed by Connolly as 'almost screamingly funny in its absurdity'.

To illustrate the bankruptcy of this strategy, I will select two key events from the many available: the 1932 'Outdoor Relief' strike, the case generally cited as the model for future attempts at 'working class unity' and the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council Strike which brought down the 'Power-Sharing' Executive, a case about which the left is (not surprisingly) silent.

Two factors were important in creating the conditions for the 'Outdoor Relief' strike. Firstly, Protestant unemployment had risen rapidly. Between January 1930 and October 1932, when the strike broke out, employment had fallen by 87% in the Protestant dominated shipyards (see Isles and Cuthbert, 'An Economic Survey of Northern Ireland', HMSO Belfast p. 594). Secondly, the republican movement had been further disorientated and weakened by the election of De Valera's Fianna Fail (anti-Treaty) government in the South.

As a consequence there was no apparent threat to partition in the minds of the Protestant workers. The combination of extreme poverty and the security of Partition, the guarantee of Protestants' privileged position in the Six Counties' labour market, facilitated the united action.

However, the traditional Protestant response to rising unemployment was never far below the surface. In 1931 the 'Ulster Protestant League' was set up 'to safeguard the employment of Protestants'. Unionist leaders like Craigavon made demagogic speeches encouraging Protestant employers not to employ any Catholics. With the economic upturn of the mid 1930s, incipient class unity was destroyed and by 1935 Protestant workers 'celebrated' the Jubilee of King George V by murdering Catholics, driving hundreds from their work and burning many out of their homes (see Michael Farrell, 'Northern Ireland, the Orange State', Pluto 1980, pp. 136-40).

Similarly with the Loyalist workers' response to what they perceived as a sellout of the link

between the Six Counties and Britain, via the Power-Sharing Executive with its institutionalised Catholic representation and 'Irish dimension'.

John O'Mahony has failed to appreciate that it is the social position of the Protestant working class which has led it to line up with the Protestant bourgeoisie and with the British state, the guarantor of capitalist social relations in Ireland

against any nationalist threat to the privileged position of the Loyalist working class in the Loyalist state. The actions of the Protestant working class are neither those of 'dupes' nor are they a threat to the Protestant ascendancy. Their opposition to the Unionist establishment was motivated by the same force that drove them to chase Catholic workers out of the shipyards. In both conditions they were

defending their privileged status.

Of course, the Protestant working class is exploited under capitalism, but its relative privileges, which form the very basis of Partition and the division of the Irish working class, mean that they cannot act as a working class so long as their privileges and Partition survive. The crucial modification of the wage labour/capital relationship

produced by the sectarian state means that the Protestant working class can have nothing in common with the Catholic working class.

Any call for Protestant/Catholic working class unity is a chimera which serves to mask the real issue: the political oppression of Ireland by British imperialism.

## Corroding internationalism

### Jo Quigley, SO 137

IN THE May 26 edition of your paper a certain Alistair Todd of Cambridge claimed the sanction of James Connolly for his proposition that attempts to unite Protestant and Catholic workers were "screamingly funny" in their absurdity. To substantiate this rather sweeping assertion he advanced two proofs — a specific one drawn from history and a more general one drawn from sociology.

Citing an exception to prove the rule Todd insists that the brief but very real unity achieved between the Falls and the Shankill during the 1932 Outdoor Relief Strike cannot be seen as a model for future activity. His reasoning is most instructive.

He doesn't deny Protestant capacity to express class solidarity with Catholic workers. His objection is that such solidarity can only emerge when "there was no apparent threat to partition in the mind of Protestant workers." To clinch the matter Todd tells us that Protestant access to alleged privileges crucially modifies the wage-labour/capital relationship. So much so that they "can have nothing in common with the Catholic working class."

Todd has most succinctly woven together a number of themes that constitute in large measure what I would describe as the pathological condition of the British Left on the Irish question. Consequently his reasoning is worthy of critical scrutiny.

Firstly the facts. Not only did Connolly (and Larkin) not regard it as peculiar to unite Protestant and Catholic workers around bread and butter issues, but they actually achieved some success when they worked for such unity.

In July 1911 for instance Connolly led out 300 dockers (Catholic) in sympathy with Protestant employees working for the Head Line Company.

Most seamen had just settled a dispute in which they had been supported by dockers and now Protestant seamen reciprocated when cross channel dockers

(Protestant) and deep sea dockers (Catholic) came forward with their own demands.

Collections for the strike were preceded through the streets of Belfast by a "Non-Sectarian Labour Band" composed of players drawn from both Orange and Catholic brass bands.

Three months later the Band was wheeled out again, this time in support of Catholic 'mill girls' who had approached Connolly for help in forming a union. Better paid Protestant 'mill girls' were already organised in the Textile Operatives Society, but many defied their leader Mary Galway and came out in solidarity with the Catholic workers.

Connolly had his enemies, of course, who like Alistair Todd were hostile to Connolly's efforts to forge trade union co-operation between Catholic and Protestant workers.

While he was attending Mass during the 'mill girls' strike, the celebrating priest launched an attack upon him, and Mary Galway sounds uncannily like Alistair Todd when at the Belfast Trades Council she complained of Connolly's 'interference' and told him to "confine himself to the class of workers he was sent to represent."

What Connolly found "screamingly funny" was something quite different. Namely the reliance upon English literature and arguments to promote socialist sentiment in the very different conditions of Belfast.

Readers who wish to judge the matter for themselves can find the quote in its full and proper context on page 267 of the Penguin selection of James Connolly's writings or on page 41 of the Cork Workers Club pamphlet 'Ireland upon the Dissecting Table.'

Let us examine a little more closely the limited capacity of Protestant workers to express class solidarity. This is restricted, so Todd tells us, to periods when the threat to Partition is lifted.

Todd is unquestionably correct in recognising that while Protestants feel their sense of community to be under threat class sentiment is overwhelmed by national sentiment. But what is so remarkable about that? However regrettable it may be the historical record is quite unambiguous. The working classes of all countries have invariably put nation before class when they have felt the borders of their territory, their community, their nation to be under threat. Whether the threat is real or imaginary the response has been the same.

During the history of the German dockers, there are not a few proud moments of class solidarity with their English counterparts, but I would suggest to Alistair Todd that it would indeed be screamingly funny in its absurdity to seek evidence of such unity during the fire bombing of Hamburg.

Quite unwittingly Todd has pointed to what could be the beginning of wisdom on the Irish question. The class unity of Protestant and Catholic workers against capitalism can indeed flourish, as Alistair Todd admits, but only if Protestant sense of cultural separateness from the Catholic Irish nation is respected.

Conversely, as long as socialists endorse the 'irredentist' republican campaign to subjugate Protestants into a nation they feel no part of, no working class unity will ever be possible.

The significance that Todd wishes to attach to the sectarian

### 'Connolly and Larkin did not regard it as peculiar to unite Protestant and Catholic workers around bread and butter issues'

operation of the wage-labour/capital relationship also bears little examination. In no capitalist country will he find a pure unmodified labour market. The squalid goings on in the North East corner of Ireland are small beer indeed compared to other 'crucial modifications' of that relationship.

Young against old, skilled against unskilled, black against white, and, most crippling of all, men against women. What are the disadvantages suffered by Catholics in the Lagan Valley compared to the pervasive discriminations systematically practised against female workers?

More often than not the "crucial modifications" will be legally and publicly institutionalised. Does Todd draw the conclusion he logically should from his own argument: female workers can have nothing in common with male workers. If not, why not?

It is the responsibility of socialists to strive to unite all oppressed. Given the very diversity and mutually conflicting sectional interests that Todd is not unaware of, no resolution is possible outside of an international context.

In this resides the most fertile part of Trotsky's heritage.

In the poisoned shade of Stalin's legacy, national and sectional advocacy has corroded the earlier internationalist vision. When Todd reduces the matter to telling us what tribe/team he is cheering for we have a measure of the fall.

**'Class solidarity is restricted to periods when the threat to partition is lifted...As long as socialists endorse the 'irredentist' republican campaign to subjugate Protestants into a nation they feel no part of, no working class unity will be possible.'**

# Ireland is not two nations

**John  
O'Mahony,  
SO 138**

JO QUIGLEY (Writeback, SO 137) says many true things against Alistair Todd and others. But his view that what the Northern Ireland war is about is an "irredentist" republican campaign to subjugate the Protestants into a nation they feel no part of" is, I think, perverse.

My dictionary defines irredentism as the belief that a state should include all those citizens of other states who speak 'its own' language and belong to 'its' ethnic group. It usually has implications of chauvinism and expansionism, as with Germany in the 1930s.

That is what the Catholic revolt in Northern Ireland is about?

The 26 Counties' 'irredentist' claim that its territory includes the Six Counties has never been taken very seriously even by the Southern state. In practice they have always worked hand in hand with the Northern authorities and Britain to maintain the Border, and they do so now.

The Southern schools used to teach a variant of what is now Provisional IRA nationalism? Yes, but the state, especially during governments of Fianna Fail, 'the Republican Party' also used internment without trial, special courts and the firing squad against militant republicans who tried to act on it.

In fact, the threat that the Six County majority have felt has been the threat of the Northern Catholic minority, the main victims of partition.

In so far as there has been any Southern aid to the Northern Catholics — that is not 'irredentism', but an expression of the nationalism of an oppressed people. Lenin's dictum that the nationalism of the oppressed is not the same as the nationalism of the oppressors is frequently used by leftists to excuse their own wallowings in various nationalisms. It is nonetheless an important truth.

Any criticism of elements of Catholic chauvinism in the Republican movement, and of that movement's strategy and tactics, must be put in that context, or you wind up with a back-to-front view of the world, unable to distinguish between the oppressed and their oppressors.

The abandonment of federalism by the Republicans is, I think, a step away from Republicanism and towards Catholic nationalism. It leaves them no policy, even notionally, except conquest of the Protestants. But the dropping of federalism came ten years into the war — a war that the IRA plainly is not

winning. Federalism was adopted when the Republicans thought they would soon win and need a democratic Republican blueprint for the new Ireland.

The initiative to 'withdraw the hand of friendship offered to the Protestants in 1972' (as David O'Connell described the dropping of federalism) came from Northern Republican militants, and is, I believe, an expression of bitterness and despair at the prolonged deadlock in Northern Ireland, and their awareness that the Protestants are the decisive block to their progress.

It is a response to their experiences, an attempt to solve in words and definitions the intractable problem of Protestant hostility which they can't solve in practice, not a programme they started out with.

The present war came about not as a result of any force outside Northern Ireland driving for territorial expansion or for a unity of 'race', 'creed', or 'blood' within one border. Throughout the war the South has been virtually a foreign country. 60 years after partition, a recent opinion poll shows that only 41% in the South even consider the Northerners 'Irish'.

The energy for the Republican upsurge — which nobody in the mid '60s expected, least of all the Republicans — came from the Northern Catholic revolt. The Republicans superimposed themselves and their militarist strategy on a revolt which came from the social and political concerns of the Catholics, and from their will to break out of the Partition state.

The revolt of the Six County Catholics was a just and necessary revolt against the intolerable injustice of partition, and against its intolerable consequences for the Northern Catholics.

Jo Quigley implies that the Protestants are a separate nation. The 'two-nationist' position is right now inextricably linked with the defence of the untenable and unjust status quo in Northern Ireland. Variants of it have for 100 years been a propaganda tool of Britain and

**'The "two-nationist" position is inextricably linked with defence of the untenable and unjust status quo'**

the Irish Unionists against the claim of the majority of the Irish people to self-determination. How can there be Irish national independence when there is not one but two antagonistic Irish nations? The Irish need Britain to rule them! That was the original version.

As a definition of Irish reality the theory is rubbish. For Marxists a nation is a social complex embodying a common history, language, culture, economy, and territory. A fully distinct nation is most pointedly what the culturally and historically distinct Protestant community in Northern Ireland is not.

It is interlaced and intertwined in the same territory with the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, though the density of the interlacing varies from area to area.

'National minority' would be a possible description, but 'distinct community' is better, I think: it is a social formation with some of the features of a distinct nation which has failed to develop fully into one, and for which full autonomy of development has not been possible because it is enmeshed with another community, and with Britain.

To call the Protestant community as it is now a distinct nation is to fade out of the picture the complexities that arise exactly where it differs from a distinct nation, and which creates the problem we must solve where it shares the territory with the Catholic community.

Even if there were a Protestant Irish nation the Six Counties would certainly not be its natural and proper territorial expression.

An intense communal civil war in Northern Ireland, and the mass forced population movements and massacres that would be an inevitable part of it, is the most likely way that the Northern Ireland Protestants, concentrated in the areas where they are now the big majority, could become a fully distinct nation. (And tragically it may prove to be the role in history of the present Republican movement — despite their intentions and most fervent wishes — to trigger such a development).

Jo is right to say that respect for the "Protestant sense of cultural separateness" from what he calls "the Catholic Irish nation" is irreplaceable. It is inconceivable that the N. Ireland Catholics could be won to that view if it means accepting the artificial Six County state within which they have been imprisoned these 60 years. The solution is to rearrange the connection between the Catholic and Protestant people of Ireland on democratic lines, reflecting the natural Irish majority and minority.

The only way the reasonable Protestant demand for recognition of their separate identity can be reconciled with the rights of the majority of the Irish people, of whom the oppressed Northern Catholics are part, would be a united Ireland with internal autonomy for the Protestants.

It is perverse to blame the Catholics and demand that they accept the status quo: all experience has shown it to be unviable as well as unjust and destructive of the labour movement in Northern Ireland. Jo Quigley merely parallels the politics of Alistair Todd and others (just as Militant twins the IRSP).

Todd says ignore class questions and focus on the national question (as if any national or other political question can exist for us apart from the class question!) Quigley says: accept the status quo, concentrate on class unity, and hope the Catholic revolt and the Orange backlash go away.

They won't. So do we condemn the Catholics as 'irredentists' and demand that they accept the existing Six Counties as the expression of the legitimate democratic rights of the Protestants? This is the politics of passive-conservative defence of the untenable status quo.

The discussion between advocates of 'class unity' versus 'national liberation struggle' versus 'rights for the Protestants' reminds me of the well-known poem about the 'six blind men of Hindustan' who 'went to view the elephant'.

They couldn't agree on what the elephant was because they formed different opinions according to which part of it they had felt — trunk, tail, legs, ears. Unable to see, they couldn't form a coherent picture putting together the different parts.

Concern for the Protestants must be integrated with the unresolved issue of Irish national rights; concern for the Northern Ireland Catholics and Irish national independence must integrate with awareness of what the Protestants are and what the 'Protestant problem' is; concern for class unity must integrate with the building of a socialist movement concerned also for the just struggle of the Catholics; concern for Irish national independence against Britain must integrate with a proper and consistently democratic concern for the relations between the different sections of the Irish people.

It is easier to fit these things together on paper than in life. But until they are fitted together in life, there will be no solution. And the longer it is delayed, the more likely the catastrophe of a sectarian civil war becomes.

# Workers divided three ways

**Bas Hardy**  
**SO 140**

SOMEWHERE alongside the railway line between Liverpool and Kirkby is painted the legend "Paisley is a dickhead — Ian, not Bob". Such sentiments sum up the repulsion most ordinary workers in Britain feel about Ulster Protestants in general, and Protestant politicians in particular.

The political situation in the North of Ireland is seen as an anachronism — something which pre-dates the class politics of British society.

From this general background many on the far left derive a position of support for the national struggle, which equates the Irish nation with Vietnam, Palestine, Algeria, Zimbabwe, etc. It sees the Protestants as a monolithic pro-colonial block to be driven from Ireland in the same way as the white Rhodesians, or the Pieds Noirs from Algeria.

Alistair Todd (SO 133) adopts this approach when he asserts the primacy of the national struggle. Anyone saying otherwise — trying to insist on the primacy of class struggle and the development of socialist politics in Ireland — at best is chasing after the will o' the wisp.

Unfortunately, real world situations are more complicated than the romanticised perceptions of national struggle held by young and not so young British lefts who sing "The Merry Ploughboy" in cosmopolitan alehouses after closing time on a Friday night.

The heroic nationalist population in republican communities is in a situation today of political isolation and impasse because of objective developments which have taken place since partition.

They not only face the hostility of Protestants and the repression of British and Irish state forces, they are also suffering the neglect, apathy or hostility of the various political and social forces in the 26 county Irish state.

To pursue Protestant/Catholic unity is a chimera? Evidence for this is the fact that only once was there a juncture of class interests between the communities, in 1932.

But what about unity between the northern nationalist workers and the labour movement in the south? To my knowledge there has been no evidence of this since the Bloody Sunday demonstrations of 1972 — a full eleven years ago. In fact the

most 'left wing' forces in the South (Sinn Fein, the Workers' Party; Socialists Against Nationalism; the Irish Labour Party) have put themselves quite shamelessly against involvement of Southern labour in northern struggles.

It would be justifiable to say that the working class in Ireland is divided three ways — Northern Protestant, Northern nationalist, and Southern.

Does this mean that because there has been very little unity between southern labour and the Northern nationalist population in the past, this will always be the case? If Marxists adopted such an approach we would deny change in society.

To rule out a junction of interests between sections of Protestant workers and the nationalist population would also be a nonsense. We have to start from the fact that a small minority on its own cannot achieve the programme of ending British political rule in Ireland.

Somehow, conditions have to be created whereby this small minority can link up with the rest of the working class, North and South. In the creation of these conditions, nationalists and socialists must turn imperialist plans to their own advantage.

The essentially conservative character of Irish society precludes socialism as an immediate possibility. British imperialism can run a war in Ireland well into the next century if it wishes because the scale of casualties it sustains is politically acceptable and because it is fighting a community which represents less than 10% of the Irish population.

It would prefer to find a solution, however. Imperialism has four options.

1. Integration of Northern Ireland into the UK.
2. Repartition.
3. 'Independence for Ulster'.
4. Federalism.

Even Thatcher would rule out solutions one and three because of the importance of the Southern economy and its increased political weight in the EEC structure.

Repartition is a solution which would satisfy nobody, economically, socially or politically. The 'Federal solution' — the one cherished by the British government, by parts of the Official Unionist establishment and by the Southern Irish bourgeoisie since the 1960s — is clearly the one taken out by Northern Irish Secretaries of State every so often when conditions allow, for serious implementation.

The paradox is that the force most opposed to this 'solution' is the Protestant community which wants to restore the pre-direct rule situation.

The only alternatives they have to this are either to leave Ireland or to recognise their 'Irishness'. I would prefer the latter. I would say that people's consciousness can change. I would say that large sections of the Protestant community would recognise a common interest with their fellow workers.

During the American Civil War, the emerging British labour movement sided with the Union against the Confederacy even though in the immediate term it was against their 'economic interests'. Since then the British labour movement has been riddled with racist and pro-imperialist sentiments.

Was the action of the Lancashire workers then an exception?

O'Mahony "fails to recognise" the social position of the Protestant workers? Comrade Todd suffers from political dyslexia. It is the fact that he does recognise them which makes his recent articles on Ireland so important. And this political recognition should aid the struggle of the Irish working class to throw off the yoke of capitalist oppression.

## The process asserts itself!

**Donal R**  
**O'Connor**  
**Lysaght,**  
**open letter**  
**to John**  
**O'Mahony,**  
**SO 128**

Dear John,

Your articles in Socialist Organiser 118 and 119 have left you contradicting yourself badly.

On the one hand there is your record as an anti-imperialist supporting the Irish national democratic struggle; on the other, there is your latest political analysis of the material forces involved in that struggle.

You will find that the two will be increasingly in conflict until either the revolutionary or the other will prevail.

The excuse for your pieces is small enough in itself, but might just as well be eliminated here. I don't know, any more than I think you do, of any Ulster

Protestant worker (or, indeed bourgeois) disturbing him/herself from the Republican movement because it abandoned 'Federalism'. I would not expect to hear of one who did so.

'Federalism', or the reserving of functions to a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People within a United Ireland was never really intended as a 'hand of friendship' for the national minority. It reassured the most backward elements who dominated the Provos' early years, that Irish unity need not end some of the most repulsive religious sectarian features of Twenty-six County life that had been enforced under partition.

The Protestant ethos would dominate Ulster: the other three provinces would be saved for Rome. It might be called an insurance against the Permanent Revolution.

However the said process asserts itself. After thirteen years, 'federalism' has been ended by the same people who are pushing for Sinn Fein to oppose the Anti-abortion Amendment (by the way, John, you are wrong again,

here. Sinn Fein as a whole is not in favour of the amendment, it abstains to appease its old 'Federalists'. Even so, ten years ago, these latter would have had it supporting the move, at least in principle).

More serious than your defence of 'Federalism' is your denial of the relevance of Permanent Revolution to Ireland and, a most serious new development, your bolstering of this position with a medley of half truths and Unionist propaganda.

This last is new. Your view on Permanent Revolution has remained constant, though it has covered a number of contrasting positions. In 1969, it was held to justify a call for the repartition of Ireland.

Some seven years later, you told me firmly that, after all, the Ulster Protestants were simply 'colons'. Now you return to your original line. However, this is no longer justified by ignorance.

After 14 years in the Irish Solidarity movement, the contradiction between your revolutionary tasks and your view is becoming critical. Your recent articles



are a major part of the process in which a slight scratch is becoming a threat of gangrene.

You deny the relevance of the Permanent Revolution to Ireland because "Ireland, north and south, is an advanced bourgeois society". There are three replies to this.

The first is that it is based on an over-simplification of the normal conditions for Permanent Revolution. The second is that if the said over-simplification is accepted then it should be applied to Ireland throughout this century.

After all, Ireland in 1914 had a larger proportion of its population employed in industry than had Russia. As far as the peasantry was concerned, more than half its land had been taken from the landlords. Perhaps, then, Connolly should not have gone out in the national democratic Rising in 1916? Such is the conclusion of Militant Irish Monthly, the Irish branch of the International Ted Grant Fan Club.

And with this we come to the third argument in favour of the Permanent Revolution in Ireland. For, in practice, if the way forward for the Irish workers is not through the said process and strategy, then ways would be open that would otherwise be diversions.

It might be possible to unite on a lasting basis within the borders of the Six County state Catholic and Protestant workers. In a Permanent Revolution scenario, this would be to try to unite vanguard and rearguard without the centre. Without such a concept, a shortcut appears to a workers' state, regardless of the democratic aim of national unity.

(Again, you claim that Britain would grant this only for the Protestants: and against all published evidence, that it has been manoeuvring to this end since 1964).

Obviously, such a shortcut would have to be used by socialists and it has indeed been followed by, amongst others, Paddy Devlin, Conor Cruise O'Brien, the Workers' Party (formerly Official Sinn Fein), the British and Irish Communist Organisation and, of course, Militant Irish Monthly.

Two factors link this motley crew. All deny Permanent Revolution's validity in Ireland and all have moved steadily rightwards in the fourteen years since the start of the present struggle.

Why should this be so? It is because all the above have tried to unite an anti-imperialist section of the working class with a section that opposes imperialism politically, if at all, from the right: from positions that counter specific British Government tactics on reactionary grounds and with reactionary allies. This was the case in 1886, in 1894, in 1912, in 1920, and indeed in 1974. (Had any normal strike enjoyed the collusion of the forces of 'law and order' to the degree that the UWC did, it would have been won in half the time).

Sections of the Protestant working class do sometimes vote for socialism and may even march against an overconfident Unionist government as in 1932. Many, if not most, of these combine such a vote with a reluctance to do anything concrete to abandon the

small but real privileges that give Protestants as Protestants advantages as against Catholics.

In the main, they identify their community as anti-Catholic, not in the sense that they defend the positions of the Age of Reason, but in the sense of defending a superior material place against the Catholics in the name of religious positions not, now, qualitatively better than those of their opponents. As long as they can get away with this, they will have no need to change.

How this happened can be understood from three episodes.

1. The Protestants did not come to Ireland 'mainly by free immigration from England and Scotland . . . (going back to pre-history) . . . and, much less importantly, by official British colonisation'. The Protestant settlements of Cos. Antrim and Down differed from those in Central and Western Ulster because less famous and more thorough.

The territories concerned had been cleared as a war measure before 1603, after which they were leased to the clearers (Chichester, Hill, Conway) after that date. They planted their lands with Protestants. These were as much colons as those in less-effectively settled Fermanagh and Donegal.

Their knowledge of the fact (and fear of counter-attacks like those of 1641 and 1690) would handicap their future progressive development.

2. This was seen even in their most radical moment in 1798. Though the Presbyterian left led the Irish national revolution for a couple of months many of its number did so looking over their shoulders.

The veteran Belfast Republican, William Drennan, retreated into passive fear of the Irish majority. Henry Monroe lost the Battle of Balinahinch by refusing to use his Catholic troops in a night attack. The defeated James Dickie remarked that victory would have meant a new Catholic-Protestant civil war.

3. Such fears multiplied exten-

sively and intensively because of the way Ulster was industrialised.

Perhaps one should be grateful to you, John, for not asking the question: why was the Protestants' part of Ireland more advanced? However, to beg a question is not qualitatively better than giving a wrong answer.

In fact, Ulster's industrial supremacy was ensured by a far greater defeat of its Protestant manufacturing proletariat than anywhere else in the British Isles. (Its mainly Catholic opposite numbers in the rest of Ireland had stronger unions: capital, there, answered by removing itself).

From this pauperisation developed working class Orangeism (You don't mention the Orange Order once in your historical analysis. Why not?) Trade unionism was replaced by or co-existed with workplace discrimination on religious sectarian grounds.

By the criterion of industrial expansion, Belfast had a claim to be the British Isles' Petrograd. Instead it became - Belfast.

Fear of a 'largely agrarian, backward and priest-ridden Catholic bourgeois state' was only the subjective expression of renewed fears of displacement: now fears of largely unskilled Catholic workers taking Protestant jobs.

The 1886 Anti-Home Rule pogrom came after rumours of a Catholic threat to take over the shipyards. The 1920 pogrom was aimed at expelling Catholics employed in the wartime boom. Contrariwise, those who signed the Ulster Covenant against Home Rule in 1912 did not worry much about the right of divorce or a constitutional ban on abortion.

Historically, then, the Ulster Protestants originated as colons. Their consciousness is still a colon consciousness. Yet the objective basis for this consciousness is no longer one of colonisation. No displaced native peasantry exists on a scale that could re-settle the Protestant farmlands around Belfast and the Lagan valley.

In any case, even if their colon status was an objective fact, they would still have the right to stay

if they would accept the same rights as the native Irish.

The most accurate description of the Ulster Protestant workers is that they, or a nucleus of them constitute a labour aristocracy recruited by religion. More generally they are a backward part of the all-Ireland workforce, kept backward by imperialist concessions.

They will join us in struggle, they will fight alongside us, but they will join us late and only as a result of a thirty-two county fight. Before they join us, the struggle will have spread south of Ulster. By doing so, it will fight as a proletarian struggle as it did in 1972 and at times during the H Block agitation.

Faced by this Thirty-Two County mobilisation, sections of and eventually the bulk of the Protestant workforce will join it.

Perhaps then, the federal Ireland will be revived as a tactical move to ease the Protestants into Irish unity. However, it remains a matter of conjuncture and of conjuncture.

P.S. One last point, John, it does not behove a British revolutionary, even one with Irish ancestors, to attack Irish revolutionaries for not doing what he thinks best to avoid civil war. Such warnings are being used far too often already and, again, usually from the pro-imperialists. (They are a favourite gimmick of Conor Cruise O'Brien).

Quite apart from being patronising, it ignores the fact that today there is not much that can be done to avoid civil war short of unconditional surrender to the class enemy. Such struggles normally have highly reasonable causes: they are battles between social orders, objectively if not in form. Few Cubans or Nicaraguans would now deny the historic necessity for their country's civil struggles.

On the other hand, a defeat for progress as a result of such a war tends to come as a result of successful outside imperialist intervention as in Spain and Lebanon.

## 'Permanent Revolution' instead of class unity

Most of those who have written in over the past few months to take issue with John O'Mahony's views on Ireland are clearly people with no great knowledge of Irish society, Irish history or of the basic positions of communism - Peter Flack (SO Feb 10) being a classic case in point.

One might, however, have expected better from Rayner Lysaght. But when you cut away the U Sec gobbledegook, all comrade Lysaght has to say is:

1. All attempts to conciliate the Protestant community (e.g. through Federalism) are futile until after the creation of a 32 county state.

2. To even attempt to foster unity between the Catholics and those who 'oppose imperialism . . . if at all, from the right' (i.e.

**Jim Denham,  
SO 132**

the protestants) inevitably leads to rightist deviations and capitulation to British imperialism à la BICO, SFWP, 'Militant' and . . . Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien!

3. BICO, SFWP, 'Militant', the Cruiser and John O'Mahony all share one original sin: they 'all deny Permanent Revolution's validity in Ireland'.

I get the impression that comrade Lysaght objects to talk of workers' unity in the existing Irish context essentially because it sounds like the sort of thing 'Militant' uses as a cover for

their scab position on the national struggle. That's certainly the reaction of many comrades in England, anyway. But what a tragedy it would be if we were to discard such a fundamental communist slogan simply because renegades like 'Militant' have misused it!

Does comrade Lysaght believe that a united Ireland can be achieved by militarily defeating and physically crushing the protestants? Does he advocate such a strategy for the creation of a united Ireland? I cannot believe that he does, but that seems to be the only logical conclusion once you've ruled out conciliating the protestants - and (paradoxically) it also consigns the goal of a united Ireland to the dim and distant future when the forces of 'Permanent

Revolution' have had their way!

The comrade's confusion seems to me to stem from a misconception he shares with many socialists on the mainland, who in their (correct) eagerness to solidarise with the nationalist cause, end up forgetting the ABCs of working class politics and lapsing into petty bourgeois nationalism. In fact, there need be no contradiction between being 'an anti-imperialist supporting the Irish national democratic struggle', and advocating measures to conciliate the Protestant working class (and, really, whether or not any Protestant worker is bothered about Federalism is a rather cheap way of dismissing the orientation that O'Mahony advocates). The only people who see any contradiction are those who have given up any independent working class view of the situation and opted instead for Catholic nationalism plus 'Trotskyist' rhetoric.

### **'Advocating measures to conciliate the Protestant working class'**

Finally, although I don't intend to go into the whole business of Permanent Revolution and Ireland, two points must be made. For a start, 'Militant' do not 'deny Permanent Revolution's validity to Ireland'. In fact they proclaim the applicability of this theory to Ireland very loudly and with monotonous regularity — and I'm surprised comrade Lysaght is not aware of this. So much for the idea that allegiance to this particular view of the Irish struggle guarantees intransigent anti-imperialism...

Although comrade Lysaght clearly sees 'Permanent Revolution' as some kind of on-going process, complete with 'vanguards', 'rearguards' and 'the centre' (??), I would still ask him — along with all those who proclaim the relevance of this theory to Ireland — where are the 'peasant masses', and where is the unresolved 'agrarian question'? As far as I can see, to try to apply Trotsky's theory (of central importance in backward, non-industrial societies) to an advanced, industrialised country with a numerically dominant proletariat and a developed labour movement, is at best misleading, and at worst to use Trotsky's theory as a cover for seeking an alliance with the national bourgeoisie.

# The answer: spread to

**Donal R  
O'Connor  
Lysaght, SO  
147**

THE DEBATE opened by John O'Mahony has ranged quite widely. During this time, the discussion's original begetter has closed his apparent strategic openings to two-nationism, at least for the time being (SO138).

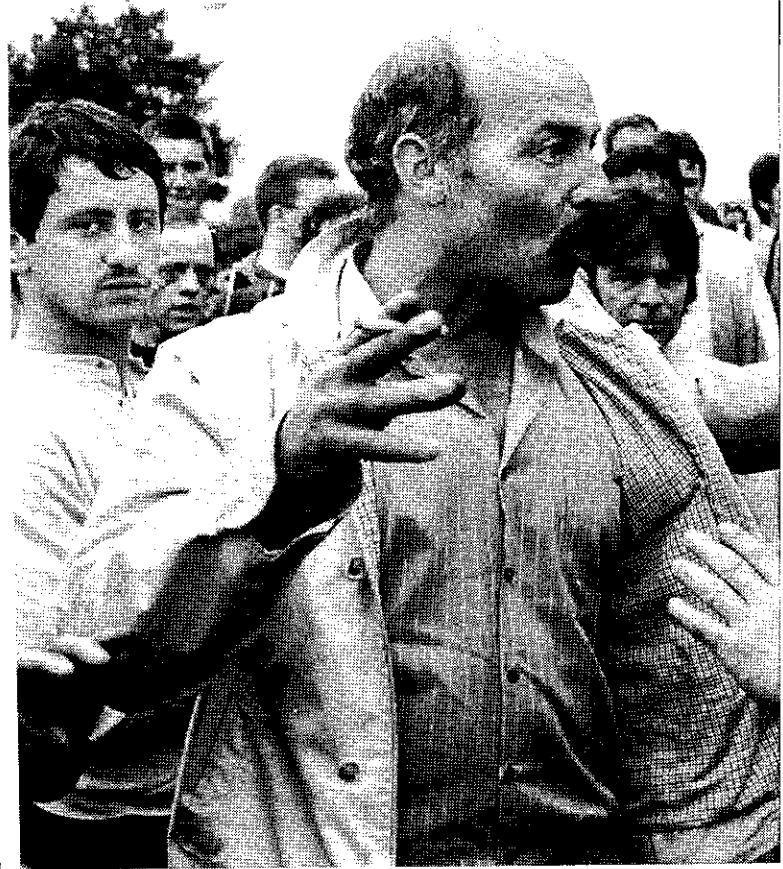
On the other hand, he has done this in the name of an uncertain middle way between the two nationists on the one hand and Peoples Democracy and the Republicans on the other (SO129).

The trouble with this middle way is that, without the Permanent Revolution, it remains uncertain and, hence a prey to eclecticism. Its clearest feature is its call to integrate Ireland's various potential revolutionary struggles. But who would disagree? Gerry Adams wouldn't, for one; however, he would insist that such integration would be done subject to the primacy of the armed struggle. People's Democracy would also agree, and, having done so, it would then turn to the practical day-to-day tasks of integration which it has been struggling to achieve for a number of years.

In this, it will continue to find more adequate guidance from Permanent Revolution than from John O'Mahony. As a revolutionary group fighting in Ireland, PD has to take positions and fix priorities for its areas of work. What John O'Mahony, and even more specifically Bas Hardy (SO140) do is blur the necessary choices that are involved in this.

They agree that a military struggle based on a minority of the population in six of Ireland's thirty-two counties cannot achieve its ends. So does PD. Where PD differs is that its perspective leads it to see the struggle as necessarily spreading in one direction; the SO comrades reserve the options.

To Bas Hardy, the possibility of an appeal to the workers of the Republic is neither more nor less than the hope of winning the Protestant workers of Northern Ireland. Yet, even an empirical approach, if based on accurate data, would show that the two tasks were qualitatively different in their feasibility.



**'A military struggle based on a minority in six of Ireland's 32 counties cannot achieve its ends... The answer it to appeal to the workers of the Republic... This means that the struggle must become politically working-class... When that occurs, the federal tactic may become important'.**

ity. To win the Northern Irish Protestant worker means overcoming a real objective breach in the province's working class, a breach that the six county state was created to maintain; to win the worker of the Republic means overcoming the subjective factors that are fostered by

the workers' leaders as well as by the bourgeois ones — whether 'Catholic Nationalist' or not.

Overcoming this last means that the struggle must become a politically working class one because Republican economics

# the South



Catholic residents argue with the RUC as an Orange parade goes down Garvaghy Road, Portadown: 12 July 1986. Photo: Martin Shakeshaft.

in the old style have no more credibility with the twenty-six county workers than with the vocally nationalist (let alone the other) capitalists.

Of course, the other side of the picture is also true, and, it should be necessary to add, even more important for socialists. The fact that those whom Bas Hardy calls the most left wing labour organisations have left the national struggle to the Republicans has not helped their political consciousness nor their popularity.

Together their vote is still less than that of the Labour Party alone in 1969; after fourteen years, this cannot be ascribed to war fever or chauvinism. Worse still has been their political decline. Labour is now in a state of semi-permanent bourgeois coalition.

Sinn Fein (now just) the Workers' Party has abandoned its mass struggle perspective for

an electoralist one which is certainly to the left of Labour, but only insofar as Labour's 1920s policies were more radical than those it has today. As for the puny sub-Roy Jenkinsees of Socialists Against Nationalism (now the Democratic Socialist Party) it is difficult to understand how Bas Hardy can list them among the most left wing Labour organisations while ignoring the Communist Party; at least Stalinism has more claim to Socialism than Liberalism.

So, to answer Jim Denham (SO132), there is no question of a thirty-two county 'Catholic Nationalist' bloc being able to destroy partition. If this were, indeed, the precondition for winning Irish national unity, then, yes, the desirability of that would have to be reconsidered.

In fact, the Catholic Nationalists (in the only true meaning of that much abused term: those who combine the desire

for Irish unity with that of state support for Catholic teaching) are hindered by their Catholicism (and, in most cases, more basically, their capitalism) from trying to mobilise the sort of mass support that is needed to threaten partition.

In fact, and hints of this appeared in 1972 and during the H Block agitation, only a working class movement can even put the destruction of partition on the agenda of practical politics.

When that occurs, the federal tactic may become important, but in its proper role, as a tactic, not a principle in the way of the secular programme of socialism.

Another point of Jim Denham's was less valid. The present writer is not worried to be told that he is writing 'United Secretariat gobbledegook', but to ascribe the phrase to a letter of which one-third is accurate history is worthier of Gerry Healy than of a serious Marxist.

The truth is that, in his original article, John O'Mahony tried to bolster his case by resorting to mythology rather than history. All Marxists must share his hopes (SO129) for the radicalising of the Protestant workers; no Marxist can accept the use of inaccuracy to bolster such hopes. Jim Denham need not accept the version of Irish history given in the 'Open Letter'; he should not condemn it out of hand; let him research for himself before judgement.

Connected to this is Jo Quigley's two-nation line. There is a very basic error here, albeit one lifted from an opponent. He quotes the assertion that Protestant workers are militant until the national question is raised as justification for his position. Had he considered the facts he wouldn't be so sure.

On the one hand, an important reason for rejecting the Protestants' claim to nationhood, separate from that of the rest of the Irish is the failure of their working class to produce its own Socialist Unionist Party (apart from the pathetic Northern Irish Labour Party, whose rise began only as an after-effect of the decline in the industrial working class base).

On the other hand, and more directly connected with the relationship of Protestant working class militancy to the national question, a study of such militancy and reaction to it reveals a different pattern to the simple, 'militant struggle aborted by nationalism' scenario.

In each case, there was a period (most notably, the Larkin-Connolly IT&GWU,

1907-11; the years 1919-20) in which national and proletarian militancy co-existed. In each case, there was a failure by the Irish working class as a whole to find leadership (at once qualitative and quantitative) such as would unite these strands.

The national struggle, the fight to achieve state power, was left to the national bourgeoisie, while British imperialism and its Unionist bourgeois allies were able to appeal successfully to the Protestant workers who could expect from their own religious kind a certain place in the sun that the national bourgeoisie could not guarantee.

There remain two other points to be considered. Both were made by Jim Denham.

In the first place, it is true that, in presenting his *Alma Ata* theses on the process and strategy, Trotsky stipulated that the latter arose from the objective conditions of combined development in countries with a large peasantry and a relatively small working class.

It is also true that Trotsky wrote little on Ireland and that his largest work, an article on the 1916 Rising, was full of valuable insights but fundamentally incorrect in its prediction for the future.

He had little, if anything to say on partitioned Ireland, a country with, in the last twenty years at least, an urban working class comparable in size to its rural dwellers, but in which a major sector of what should be the proletarian vanguard has been effectively politically declassified originally as a result of the peculiar course of its area's industrialisation. Had Trotsky considered this, he might or might not have considered permanent revolution to be relevant to it. We do not know.

At the same time, it is true that another of Trotsky's preconditions for the strategy was its leadership by a Bolshevik party and that, since 1917, the successes of the process have been achieved, if unsatisfactorily, without such leadership. As Lenin said, quoting Goethe, theory is grey, the tree of life, green.

Last and by far the least is Jim Denham's correction as to Militant. It may be true that its supporters bandy Permanent Revolution in Britain. They are considerably more circumspect here. It seems likely that their loyalty to the strategy is on the same line as Gerry Healy's loyalty to the Dialectic and to the Transitional Programme: a standard to brandish, rather than a means to effective action.

# Federalism is no solution



Guard of honour for H-Block prisoner Micky Devine

## Tony Richardson, document circulated to SO supporters

John O'Mahony has written a series of articles in SO arguing for a "federal" solution in Ireland. I want to argue against this and at the same time show that he is projecting a reformist position. It is not wrong to argue for reforms, but it is wrong to argue for a reformist *solution* to the Irish struggle.

The British government laid the basis for the division of Ireland in December 1919. The resources to maintain that division through armed force was provided by the British government. Thus from the beginning it was clear that the Loyalists had the backing of British imperialism. It was also clear that the vast majority of the Irish people wanted the British out. This, however, was completely unacceptable to the British ruling class. They were concerned not only with Ireland, but were trying to stave off the decolonialisation of the empire.

Thus in 1921-2 negotiations, the British government stuck on two principles: 1) that the Protestants of Ulster should have the right to form a separate state; and 2) that the southern Irish parliament should still be required to swear an oath of allegiance to the King.

For its part, the Southern Irish bourgeoisie was both negotiating for independence and looking over its shoulder at the strength of the working class and the freedom fighters. Thus when the British threatened to send 200,000 troops to enforce their control, the Irish negotiators — particularly Griffiths and Collins caved in and agreed to the "Treaty". (The oath was finally removed, but the Northern state remained).

De Valera had opposed the Treaty. His opposition however faded out, and he withdrew his document. His problem was that it was very difficult to tell the difference between his proposals and the terms of the "Treaty". He had proposed a "federal solution" — that within a united Ireland the Loyalists would have a defined area with local control. This involved persuading the Protestants of the North to accept a united Ireland. At various times, De Valera resurrected his proposal for a federal solution, but was each time rebuffed.

It is worth noting that his proposal in 1921-2 involved a negotiated settlement with the British government. He was opposed to the continuation of the *struggle* for a united Ireland. True he did, in a half-hearted way, join the anti-Treaty rebellion, but he was more or less forced into it by the complete sell-out.

The possibility of a federal solution was raised again by the Provisional IRA in 1972, a position which they held until 1982. It was raised at a time when they thought they could reach a negotiated settlement with the British government. They also raised a nine-county Ulster, which they also saw as a means of persuading the loyalists to work with them. This was *not* a class solution. It was a federal solution in which the loyalists would control some counties, and the Provisionals the others.

It is worth making these points to show that federalism is not a new idea, but has been raised previously by the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalists. This does not necessarily make it wrong, but we would have to differentiate ourselves from these forces if we were to adopt it.

So should we adopt it as a solution? A comrade at the Summer School asked O'Mahony exactly what he meant by a

Federal solution. He put it this way: the problem with federalism comes when you try to define exactly what it means. How much *control* would the loyalists have in their area? Would they control the police, for example — with the history of the B Specials — surely not! Would they control housing, with the loyalist record on that issue — surely not! But the question of control was crucial. Surely a federal solution would either give control to the Protestants and therefore be oppressive to the Catholics, or it would give no real control to the Protestants, and would therefore be unacceptable to them.

This question was never answered. In a later session, O'Mahony said the details were still not worked out. But we have to insist on an answer — Comrade O'Mahony always talks about being realistic, but would the loyalists accept anything which did not give them control and the ability to oppress nationalist people? In a previous EB meeting, O'Mahony said a bit more about it. Then, he argued that British imperialism did not really want to be in Ireland, since it was costing them a lot of money. However they could not withdraw since it would result in civil war.

## 'A federal solution would give control to the Protestants'

He went on to argue that a federal solution was now possible, since the communities had unravelled during the war and it was now possible to draw a new border which would exclude almost all of the nationalist population. Asked how a federal solution would then be achieved, he said it would be through negotiations between the representatives of the two communities in the North, the British government and the government of the Republic.

But who is the representative of the loyalists — Paisley? If such negotiations did come about, it would strengthen British imperialism by legitimising its rule. It would also strengthen the likes of Paisley, and it would say to the loyalist workers that we recognise the right of such people to speak for them. It would also mean that we recognised them as a separate community defined by their Protestantism. Such a division would strengthen the Catholic church in the same way, since it would be the formal acceptance of the creation of a Catholic state.

There is another question to consider in a federal solution — the relatively privileged position that the Protestant

population, including the workers, have as a result of the Orange state. The loyalists have held the privileged position for a long time. It is the material basis of their unity and their loyalism. They see British imperialism as defending their privileges. In any federal solution they will ask if they are to preserve their privileges – if they are, then that would imply a separate state or at least complete control by the loyalists and the continued oppression of the nationalist population – if on the other hand it means that they must *lose* their privileges, then they would fight it on the streets whatever else was involved.

Nor should we get confused over the question of *democratic rights* for the loyalists. Everyone is in favour of maximum democratic rights for the Protes-

**‘There is a difference between democratic rights and control, which is the minimum that the Loyalists will accept’.**

tants in a united Ireland. But there is a vast difference between democratic rights and *control* which is the minimum that the loyalists will accept.

The reality is that there is no easy

solution, and federalism is not one either. The loyalists have to be broken from their pro-imperialist position. Even if the level of the class struggle has dropped dramatically in the North (as opposed to the South), we still have to look to this. It is only through the Protestant workers’ class experience that they can begin to question their role in the Orange state. But the question is only raised in the course of the anti-imperialist struggle. Thus the only possibility of uniting sections of the Protestant working class is through the combination of struggle on both class questions and the national struggle. This can be helped by the development of a mass based troops-out movement, which gives no concessions to pro-imperialism in Ireland.

# The logic of O’Mahony’s position on Ireland

**Tony Richardson, second document circulated to SO supporters**

## Reformism

O’Mahony said at the summer school that in his opinion there is no possibility of a revolutionary upsurge in Ireland, and that we therefore “have to deal with *reality*. Ireland will either be united by the revolutionary movement of the working class, or there will have to be some relationship between the British and the Southern governments.” True he said that if there was a revolutionary upheaval then “we have to be flexible” and then he would put forward a socialist solution – but in the meantime he would advocate a negotiated federal solution.

It should be made clear that it is fully a part of our revolutionary programme to fight for reforms. One example of such democratic demands would be the defence of democratic rights of the Protestants in a united Ireland. However, revolutionaries differ from reformists in that they see the solution of the problems of the working class in the taking of state power; this means smashing the capitalist state and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat (Trotsky tells us of the socialists who keep their talk of socialism for May Day speeches).

Surely it is the role of revolutionaries to give leadership in a way which not

only prepares the working class for the mass upheavals but also puts us in a position to influence the direction the workers will take in the struggle.

In his Socialist Organiser article of February 3 1983, O’Mahony puts forward only two alternatives to a federal solution: to force the loyalists into a united Ireland, or to accept the status quo. He says that working class unity and “socialism now” are a part of the latter. Therefore anyone who rejects his federal solution are a part of the latter.

‘I’ve always assumed the official line is we put the army’s version first and then any other.’  
– BBC TV news sub-editor



Therefore anyone who rejects his federal solution has to take one of the others. But surely as socialists we have to try to draw out the relationship between these things. The Militant use the class struggle and socialism now to avoid the struggle to remove British imperialism.

In reality O’Mahony’s solution is

similar to that of the Militant. He said at the summer school that “There is no way Britain will be thrown out of the Northern state”. He also argued that the withdrawal of the troops would be a part of a negotiated federal solution.

O’Mahony raises the question of *force* because he wants to pose the alternative to his policy as being a “bloodbath”. But this makes nonsense of his “realistic solution”. How can people be persuaded by words to give up something they would be prepared to go to a bloodbath to defend? Throughout the history of Ireland since 1916 the British have threatened a “bloodbath” unless they got their way.

Should the treaty of 1922 have been signed by the Irish? A Treaty which partitioned the country and forced Irish MPs to swear an oath of allegiance to the King of England? O’Mahony has said that in hindsight, Collins was right to sign it. This implies that the Communists and revolutionary nationalists who opposed it were wrong.

It is true that Collins was intimidated into acceptance of the Treaty by the threat of 200,000 troops and a potential bloodbath, but this has been the method of the civilised, protestant, British ruling class wherever they needed to defend the empire.

Of course we don’t want a bloodbath. We want the best conditions for the struggle for independence – that means the least lives lost. But the struggle for independence is a precondition for the development of the Irish working class for social revolution.

## The Labour Party connection

Every time mass struggle erupts in Ireland, sections of the ruling class begin to have doubts and try to look for a solution. One recent example was the proposal in 1971 by Harold Wilson. He

called for a united Ireland in 15 years' time. He linked this simply to *safeguards* for the minority in a united Ireland.

In 1972 he changed this to fall in line with Shirley Williams who was arguing that a united Ireland could not be *imposed* on the protestants. Like the Tories, Wilson also had a meeting with the Provisionals.

After the death of Bobby Sands (which has plainly had a big impact on the Irish issue inside the Labour Party), the Labour Party NEC report to the 1981 conference called for "unity between the two parts of Ireland". The report however also said that the Labour Party would not "force" Northern Ireland out of the UK.

Tony Benn called for British troops out and United Nations forces in. Others had appeared to go further. Reg Freason called for the "peaceful reunification of Ireland". It is clear that by stressing "peaceful" he was opposed to the use of force.

The Labour Party have continuously qualified their position on Ireland. There is a difference however from the 1949 Ireland Act. In that it was made quite clear that the Protestant community had a *veto* over a united Ireland. The more recent resolutions have been more subtle — saying simply that no force should be used. In other words, the Protestants must *agree* and thus have a *veto*.

Federalism can be seen in a similar way: what happens if the federal proposals made are not accepted by the Protestants? Is force then used, with all the possibilities of a bloodbath, etc? Or is the Protestant veto accepted? Do we then say to the nationalist population — wait until the Protestants *are* prepared to accept it?

Out of the various doubts of bourgeois politicians like Clive Soley (interviewed in Socialist Organiser) there have emerged others to their left (in varying degrees) within the Labour Party who have now taken up Ireland (thus giving great opportunities in the Labour Committee on Ireland). We will not be able



After Bobby Sands' death

to relate to such people however if we make concessions to their backwardness (i.e. to their search for a bourgeois solution). I believe that O'Mahony has developed his positions precisely in relationship to this environment. However, the best of the Labour Party democrats are going beyond this position, as shown by the way they related to the Gerry Adams visit.

### Permanent Revolution and Ireland

The 1944 Theses of the Irish Trotskyists says: "The one uncompleted task of the bourgeois revolution is national unification." I think this is right. It is through this task that Trotsky's conception of the permanent revolution is applicable.

Trotsky talks about the "burning problem for the people" existing in a country which demands the "boldest revolutionary measures". "Amongst problems of this kind are the agrarian question and the national question in their varied combinations". (Permanent Revolution, page 130). Trotsky argues for the working class to be in the forefront of the completion of the bourgeois democratic tasks.

It is clear that in the relatively developed economy of Ireland the national democratic tasks will flow together, in the manner of Trotsky's theory, into the proletarian revolution. This is not to see it as some automatic process, as the Pabloites do in Nicaragua and Grenada. Trotsky says that the "democratic tasks of our epoch lead directly to the dictatorship of the proletariat". He speaks of the revolution which "does not stop at the democratic stage". Thus the democratic demands for an united independent Ireland are connected by us (by our struggles and our programme) to the struggle for a united Ireland.

We must put the struggle for a united Ireland into this context, otherwise all we offer the Protestants is to either maintain the present status quo or join the bourgeois Catholic south. We must make a connection with them by fighting for a workers' Ireland in this way.

O'Mahony of course denies that national independence is central to the theory of permanent revolution. His hostility to the application of the theory of permanent revolution leaves him offering "at the moment" only a reformist solution. If he did accept that the permanent revolution applied to Ireland then presumably he would connect the fight for reforms to the fight for the working class to take power! But since he argues the opposite position — that Ireland is a fully developed capitalist state — he can put forward a reformist 'realistic' solution.

Possibly O'Mahony's hostility to the application of the theory of permanent revolution — since Trotsky is so clear on it — is because it would tie his hands on other issues? According to Trotsky, the tasks of the proletariat are to achieve "democratic and national emancipation" — O'Mahony leaves the latter element out).

### What is the Community?

O'Mahony argues that the Protestants are not a nation but a *community*. He wants to differentiate himself from the notorious "two-nation" theory, developed by the Irish Communist Organisation which led them to the support of British imperialism. The problem is that although he does not *call* the Protestants a nation, he *treats* them as one, since the offer of federalism is more applicable to a *nation* than a *community*.

His opposition is clearly linked to his position of self-determination for oppressor groups such as the Zionists in occupied Palestine (it is incidentally the same position as the Spartacists).

Self-determination and federalism have been historically put forward by Marxists as progressive democratic measures to those *oppressed* by imperialism. Self-determination is not an abstract principle. By offering it to those who have been party to the oppression of others actually says that that oppression will continue. For example, O'Mahony's position that the Zionists should have a veto over the self-determination of the Palestinians *ensures* that the Palestinians will not get self-determination and therefore that they will continue to be oppressed by the Zionists.

We would not consider supporting self-determination for imperialist Britain, and we should not support it for Britain's loyal supporters in a colony established and held by military force in another country.

What unites the Protestants is their relative privileges over the Catholics. They see Britain, through their loyalism, as the protector of this. This connection has been strengthened over the last 60 years. The working class has been purged of class conscious workers. 60 years of defence of their privileges is ingrained in their minds. It was Britain who established the Northern state and paid the specials to maintain it. Whenever there is any struggle for democratic rights for the oppressed Catholics, there is a reaction from the Protestant community. They always stand together in that way. That was their reaction to the civil rights movement. The more the oppressed struggle, the more the relatively privileged react.

It is clear that O'Mahony does not view it this way. He even put an article in Socialist Organiser that talked about the danger of going back to the division of the communities created by the hunger strikes!

Yet the hunger strikes created a great movement of the oppressed throughout Ireland and world wide. We need more such risings. The defence of their petty privileges by the Protestants is holding the whole working class in Ireland back.

One of the things the Protestants fear is being taken over by the Catholic South with the attacks on rights which domination by the Catholic church

would imply. This we must take into account in the form of democratic rights and the fight for a socialist Ireland.

Geoffrey Bell's book "The Protestants of Ulster" goes into much greater detail on the nature of this "community". He attacks Marxists who see the solution as "educating" the Protestants; "on this view, what is needed above all is for the Protestants to be 'educated' through concentrating on social and economic questions and so achieving some measure of Protestant/Catholic unity in practice; the national question should be relegated until such time as the Protestant workers have learned to trust their Catholic counterparts" (p. 142).

### There is hope

The only way to view the struggle in Ireland is to involve all sections of the working class — North, South and in Britain. Originally, at the time of the suppression of the Irish struggles in 1920, many councils of action called for the blacking of troops, etc. Since then, imperialist stooges in the TUC have managed to get Ireland largely off the agenda of the trade unions. The North was even exempted from the 1926 general strike. The only real involvement of the TUC has been its "Better Life For All" campaign, which was moralistic support for British imperialism.

We need to reverse the position in the trade unions. We need a solidarity movement in the trade unions which sides with the anti-unionists; which does not offer 'federal status' to the British trade unions in the North.

In the Labour Party the tradition has been for a handful of MPs to oppose the official "veto for the Protestants" line. In the early days of the partition, as within the trade unions, the situation was not so clear and a resolution was passed by the 1920 Labour party conference calling for "self-determination for the whole of Ireland". But the Labour Party has constantly supported the partition since its inception. In fact it was Labour governments which brought the troops onto the streets in 1969 and introduced internment in 1974.

Things have improved inside the Labour Party. Both the Labour Party and the Tories in the early 1970s considered a solution involving the nationalists but drew back from it. Some leading Labour politicians are still considering such a solution. They are looking the same way as they did in the Falklands War — for a negotiated settlement which would keep British economic interests intact — a kind of de-colonisation.

This has created conditions where others in the Labour Party such as Ken Livingstone are taking a more principled stand and calling for troops out. Clive Soley can call for a united Ireland, but says the troops should remain, showing his pro-imperialist politics, but others go to the crux of the matter and call for troops out. It is the principled stand of

Ken Livingstone and others which has led people like Gerry Adams to relate to the labour movement in Britain, giving a boost to the LCI. But we must give no concessions to Soley as O'Mahony did when he interviewed him in Socialist Organiser by suggesting that a Labour government could "create the political conditions for change by a *declaration of intent* to withdraw" (Federalism of course is also a concession to such elements).

In the South there have been mass class movements recently as well as a mass response at particular moments to developments in the North. This is not new of course. 100,000 demonstrated in Dublin in 1949 when the Ireland Bill was passed, and the response to Bloody Sunday and the hunger strikes was clear. The need for a working class party to connect with these movements is also clear.

## 'What unites the Protestants is their relative privileges over the Catholics'

### Programme

We have to develop a class based movement against British imperialism in Ireland. This means that whenever possible our work must be through the trade unions in Ireland and the trade unions and Labour Party in Britain. This would link up with our struggle for transitional demands which we would advance in the class struggle anywhere. But the additional and *central* element would be the solution of the national question. This would affect other of our demands. For example, we would be for workers' defence squads, but these could not be abstracted from Orange control of much of the trade union movement. So we have to put forward workers' defence squads which also demand self-determination for the Irish people as a whole. It is clear that these would be initially Catholic. But to pose them gives the possibility of an appeal to the Protestants because of their class based nature. (They would be formed through the trade unions and strike pickets, etc).

The Protestants of the North have to feel the weight of the class movements throughout Britain and Ireland. The Orange Order relies on British capitalism and hostility to the capitalist politicians in the South. We must undermine this by a class movement against both these governments.

Initially formed, workers' defence squads would be fighting alongside the Provos in defence of the oppressed Catholics. Similarly with regard to voting, because the national question is central to us and we want to develop a class-based, anti-imperialist movement, we would first be voting Sinn Fein.

This would apply in all "communities". The article in Socialist Organiser was ridiculous which argued for voting for Sinn Fein by Catholics and for a different party for the Protestants. We either vote for a party or we don't. We don't change the vote for different religions! In this instance, because of their troops out position, we should vote for Sinn Fein.

The movement we develop must be Ireland-wide, as must our programme. We campaign centrally, as do the nationalists, for a solution to the national question. We differentiate from them in that we say that only the working class can achieve this — not bourgeois governments. Therefore our movement must be involved in trying to give leadership to all struggles of the working class, North and South.

In Britain our central campaign should be for troops out now! No veto to the Protestants. For a socialist Ireland. We support within this context campaigns for political status, repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, banning of plastic bullets, etc.

We must challenge the imperialist chauvinism of the British working class. This does not mean we are provocative like the RCP, "Bring the war to Britain" — or that we lie about our attitude to civilian bombings; but it does mean we don't make concessions. The British trade union movement should be blacking troop movements and doing anything they can to help the Irish independence struggle.

Instead, virtually nothing is done. This is mainly because of the leadership which has backed up every action of imperialism. But this does not mean we don't fight in the rank and file — we have to fight chauvinism at both levels, at leadership level and rank and file.

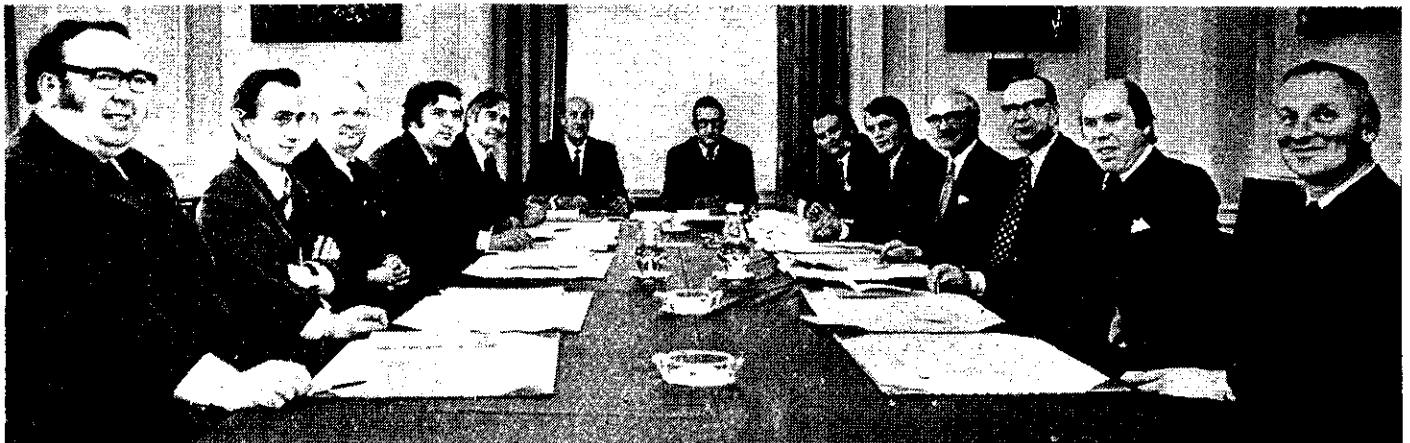
The centre of our solidarity work has to support those in struggle, sometimes *despite* their methods. Capitalism often builds its case on the methods. Leading Tory and Labour spokespeople often say they would discuss with Sinn Fein if they "renounced violence". We must be careful not to back up this attitude. At the same time we must tell the truth about our position.

I have therefore proposed an amendment to the EB resolution to the effect that in future SO articles on bombings we must first put forward our solidarity with those in struggle, and in this context we criticise civilian bombings.

**Editorial note: Unfortunately, Tony Richardson's presentation of the views expressed by John O'Mahony in various discussions is not very reliable. A fatal mixture of unfamiliarity with Irish politics and factional animus makes Richardson a very bad reporter. The publication of these pieces should be seen as an acceptance by the editors that they are accurate reports of what Richardson's opponents were saying.**



## **Provos, Protestants and working- class politics**



The power-sharing executive of January 1974 — Britain's initiative which was wrecked by a Protestant general strike



# Session I: Why should Protestant workers accept a united Ireland?

THE SCENE is Belfast in July 1983, on a Saturday, about 10am. A 'troops out' delegation has been to Belfast, where it has talked to Republicans on the Falls Road, been to look close up at soldiers on patrol, examined plastic bullets and photos of their victims, and talked to Catholics in Andersonstown.

Two men and a woman have detached themselves from the delegation and crossed the short distance from the Catholic Falls Road through part of the city centre to where the Shankill begins. Nervously, they make their way up the Protestant Shankill Road, which is festooned with red, white and blue bunting, and where even some of the coping stones on the pavement are painted red, white and blue.

Following a hand-drawn map, the three eventually make their way to a house in a side-street. After double-checking the address and the house-number with the map, one of them knocks at the door, which opens almost immediately.

The man who opens the door recognises one of the visitors and greets him warmly.

The three enter, and are led into a back room where two men are waiting, both still wearing their jackets. Introductions all round, and everybody shakes hands, and then they sit down. Beer and whisky are distributed according to choice.

The man of the house, who had opened the door, then assumes the role of chair and begins to speak.

"We've set up this discussion because some of us think there should be more dialogue between the British labour movement and the Northern Ireland Protestant people. To be more precise, I set it up.

When Tony here wrote to me and said he was coming on the delegation, it seemed too good a chance to miss, so I wrote back proposing that at least some of the troops out delegation should try to meet representatives of the Protestant working class and hear their point of view.

Tony was very reluctant, concerned I think about what the rest of the delegation would think, but he finally agreed. I'm glad he did. He's an old friend of mine.

So I suggest we get started. I'm taping the discussion, if no-one objects. No-one does? Right then.

I suggest we should introduce ourselves more fully. I'll introduce the Belfast people, and I suggest that Tony does the same for our visitors".

Robert used to be an engineering shop steward, but he's now unemployed, like so many others in Northern Ireland whose jobs have disappeared in the last few years. He was a member of the Northern Ireland Labour Party until the mid-'70s.



Jimmy is a steward at Harland and Wolff's shipyard. He was in the Northern Ireland Communist Party for a while, until the late '60s. He was a supporter of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association until 1969.

In 1974 he helped organise the Loyalist workers' strike, the political strike that brought down the power-sharing executive in May of that year. Say what you like about its political objectives, that strike was one of the most successful political general strikes in history.

I'm not sure what Jimmy thinks about it all now, though.

Unlike the rest of us, Patrick comes from the Catholic community. He started out supporting the old Nationalist Party and then supported the SDLP, which effectively superseded it as the constitutional nationalist party. After internment in mid '71 he joined the Provisional IRA. He was himself interned for three years, beginning in 1972.

My name is Jackie. I'm a school teacher now, working in one of the few mixed Catholic-Protestant schools here. I do a wee bit of trade union work. I suppose I'm still a Trotskyist. I used to be a Trotskyist, at any rate.

I keep in touch. I subscribe to the British Marxist papers. I was on the National Committee of the Young Socialists, the youth wing of Gerry Healy's organisation, which had a sizeable section in Northern Ireland until 1966 or '67, and a bit even after then.

That's where I first got to know Tony.

Robert, Jimmy, Patrick and myself together with two or three others who can't make it today, have been having what we refer to as the discussion group for the last 18 months or so, since soon after the hunger strikes ended. We are of course very loose, not a 'group'.

We've been discussing socialism and Marxism and our varying experiences over the last dozen years. That may seem rather tame to you, Tony, but the scope for working class politics that try to bridge the two communities is very limited here. We spurn the childish politics of Militant, with their silly pretence that all the main questions of politics — in the first place the 'constitutional question' — can be just ignored as you preach the jargon of a socialist solution that cannot happen unless the working class can be shown a way forward out of the communal impasse that has dominated and shaped Northern Ireland political life for the last dozen years.

Anyway, that's what we are. We do have contact with various people who say they are socialist or for the working-class interest.

Perhaps I'd better introduce Tony, before he introduces his friends.

Tony works in the motor car industry. He has been a Trotskyist since the early '60s. He now supports Socialist Organiser, I believe. Tony, I suggest you introduce the others.

**Tony** This is Anne-Marie. She's a public sector worker and a shop steward in Oxford.

And this is Mick. He's a building worker. I should add before we begin that though Anne-Marie, Mick and myself all support SO, there are a number of different strands of opinion in and around SO. Anne-Marie and I represent one strand, Mick here supports another.

You may have seen, Jackie, that we have sharp divisions on Ireland, and we've been discussing the question in the paper for some time now.

**Jackie** Yes, I subscribe to the paper, so I've been following it. That was one reason why I thought this discussion would be worth while.

Tony, perhaps you could give Jimmy, Robert and Patrick some idea of what your divisions of opinion are.

**Tony** Well, as I see it, it's a division between a revolutionary and a reformist perspective on the national question in Ireland...

**Jimmy** What national question?

**Tony** Well, the struggle against imperialism for a united Ireland, of course.

**Robert** Hold on! You can't assume we're all in favour of a united Ireland. I find it difficult to see anything socialist or democratic about going in with the South.

**Jimmy** Right you are! A united Ireland would mean Rome Rule. That's a big part of the problem. The Northern Catholics do have reason to complain. I know that, and I too marched for civil rights in 1967-8. They are an artificial minority in the Six Counties. They have been repressed. I am in favour of removing all their social grievances. I want to end sectarian discrimination in employment. I'm a long-time trade unionist. I want to root out from the unions their tacit acceptance of job discrimination against Catholics. I want class unity in Northern Ireland between Protestant and Catholic, and with British and 26 County workers too. I'm very much in favour of working-class unity across the Border. I supported the recreation of an all-Ireland trade union movement over 20 years ago, when links were re-established across the Border after a split lasting almost two decades.

Yes, but why should I come into a united Ireland where the Protestant community will be a permanent minority?

Where the state may very well be dominated by the Catholic Church, as the 26 County state has been? Where the Catholic Church will insist on sectarian education — it is the Catholic Church that particularly insists on it in Northern Ireland?

**Robert** Exactly. How will the basic law of the 32 County Ireland be established? Do we non-Catholic Northern-

ers accept those democratically decided laws of the 26 Counties which reflect Catholic teaching, on divorce and abortion for example? After all, it's to be a unitary state, and we are plainly a minority. Or is there to be negotiation, and agreement on new laws excluding the influence of the Catholic Church? But the Protestants can't initiate that.

Why haven't the Southern bosses already reformed the laws to prepare to receive us? They were against partition 60 years ago: why did they go ahead and create a sectarian Catholic state from the first years of independence?

**Jimmy** A decade ago the special place of the Catholic Church in the South was abolished, but that's just cosmetics. Look at the movement now in the South to add to the law against abortion by writing it into the constitution. The Southern Protestant churches have denounced this as sectarian, yet both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, led by the 'liberal' Garret FitzGerald, are committed to introducing it.

You talk about the Six Counties as a sectarian state. The 26 Counties is far more a real sectarian state in the usual meaning of the term, with laws derived from religion. In the North, it's a matter of social oppression rather than any formal anti-Catholic sectarian laws.

**Robert** And if the Catholic Church won't abandon its insistence on religious segregation in Northern Ireland

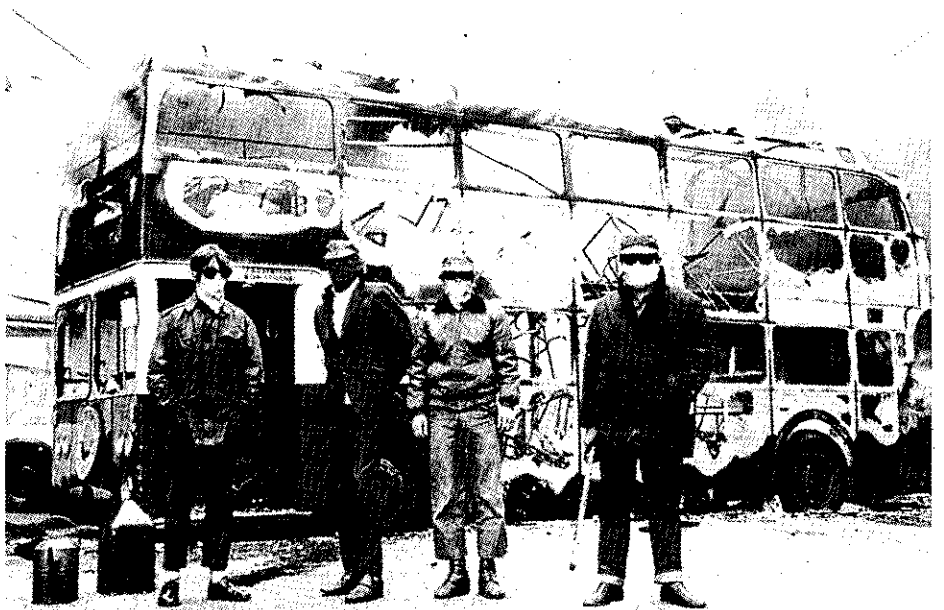
Tony Guarantee? You could have constitutional guarantees. A Bill of Rights, even. But in fact you are talking about a bourgeois united Ireland. That's defeatist. None of you believe in the permanent revolution. The answer is to start to fight for a socialist united Ireland.

**Patrick** I think Jimmy has got a point, Tony. Of course if Ireland had had home rule back in 1886 when the Liberal government first proposed it, then maybe the coexistence of Protestants and Catholics in a united Ireland would have led to a pluralist society. (Even then, you can see in retrospect, it would have had to be some sort of federal Ireland: Gladstone didn't propose that publicly, but he talked about it privately).

Maybe. But other things were possible too. Look at the example of Ceylon — Sri Lanka. They had independence in 1948 as a secular state, and inside of a decade the Tamil minority was subject to a vicious Sinhalese chauvinist drive for dominance. Why should we trust the Southern politicians? As early as 1925 they got rid of divorce, for god's sake! And it was far from a liberal divorce law even before 1925.

**Anne-Marie** But the Provos are socialists!

We're not talking about a united Ireland which would look like the 26 Counties, but a revolution changing both North and South!



schools — and it has always refused to — why should I think that it will abandon its position of power and influence in the South? Or suppose a miracle happens and the Catholic Church in the South is prepared to see all the legislation based on its doctrine in the South replaced by secular legislation acceptable to Northern Protestants — where is the guarantee that there will not be a relapse once we are 'in' and a safe minority?

**Jimmy** I'd like a socialist revolution in Northern Ireland and in Southern Ireland and in every other country too. But what has that got to do with uniting Ireland now?

**Jackie** I'm for a united Ireland, I think, under certain conditions. But Jimmy has a point, Anne-Marie: you seem to be saying that you're not for a united Ireland now, but only after a socialist revolution. But after a socialist revolu-

tion why should uniting Ireland be of any importance? I'd see it in terms of a united socialist Europe, not just Ireland.

**Robert** Anyway, there's no socialist revolution going on now!

As for Provos: they say they offer the Protestants equality before the law within Ireland. Equality before sectarian Catholic laws! The Provos have little scruple about killing Protestants in the UDR, etc — and that to my mind is sectarian killing, or most of it anyway. They have let off bombs which massacred the innocent — Bloody Friday, Le Mon restaurant, etc. The left Republicans are sectarian towards Protestants.

**'I wouldn't disparage the sincerity of those in the Provos who say they are socialists. Their tragedy is that they are limited to one community'.**

**Jimmy** In the words of David O'Connell, they have withdrawn the hand of friendship they offered to the Protestants in 1972 with the proposals about a federal Ireland. And if what we had between 1972 and 1981 was the hand of friendship, god help us in future!

**Jackie** I wouldn't disparage the sincerity of those in the Provos who say they are socialists. Their tragedy is that they are limited to one community. And you won't get socialism in one community, Tony! As a movement the Provisionals are Catholic. Whatever the socialist noises a few sophisticated representatives make, the ranks are Catholic through and through. What they offer us is forcible incorporation into a unitary Catholic state.

**Jimmy** What can we hope for if we let ourselves be forced into such an arrangement?

**Patrick** I agree, Jimmy. And I respect your efforts to fight sectarianism. But you have to look at the record: however hard we fight, sectarianism is built into this Six County state. It offers no basis for any conciliation between Catholics and Protestants, and we've had a simmering civil war for 14 years to prove it.

I think, therefore, that we've got to seek a solution in a wider framework.

That has to be some sort of united Ireland — a united Ireland with Protestant autonomy. Perhaps that means a federal Ireland, and maybe it would have some federal or confederal link to Britain.

**Robert** Yes, I know about the sectarianism in this state. But you'd get the same thing in a united Ireland — with one million Protestants oppressed instead of half a million Catholics!

**Mick** That's why a federal Ireland is the answer. The debate in SO is about how to get a united Ireland, it's true. The problem with your view, I think, Tony, is that you just pose a united Ireland as a moral ultimatum, a test of anti-imperialist virtue, to Protestant workers.

Socialist and democratic propaganda may convince Protestant workers to oppose sectarianism, to desire class unity, to be internationalists. No force on earth can convince them that they have a moral obligation to be green nationalists.

**Jackie** I think the core issue is not 'federalism' but the attitude socialists should take to the Protestant community. Does it have rights as a community, or, if you prefer that definition, as a national minority? That's the basic issue for working-class socialists. It's also the basic issue for Wolfe Tone Republicans. Jimmy will have some sympathy for that Republicanism. I don't know about you, Robert, with your NILP background, but bear with me.

The Irish Catholic majority, of which the Six County Catholics are part, have got to answer a fundamental question about the Protestants. Either the Protestants are to be treated as aliens and foreigners, to be subjugated and driven out if the majority is strong enough to do it. Or they are accepted as an integral part of the population of Ireland, recognised to have the right to be here.

Thus the question is this: what is to be the relationship of the minority to the majority? What rights can they legitimately claim as a community? What rights can the majority claim over the minority?

Gerry Adams, for example, says that the minority must submit completely to the all-Ireland majority — that the minority "cannot have any say on the wishes of the majority of the Irish people".

That takes us back to the scenario of 'drive them out or conquer them'. The Republicans now have no alternative, even in theory, but to try to conquer the Protestants. They leave themselves no alternative but the hopeless job of trying to 'reverse the conquest'. I think that's been said in SO.

Of course it's nonsense — and reactionary nonsense at that. It's also anti-Republican, in Wolfe Tone's sense of Republican.

As long as 200 years ago, secular and democratic Irish Republicanism adopted the policy of conciliating and accommodating the descendants of

English and Scottish settlers in Ireland. Wolfe Tone expressed it in its most basic terms: 'for the former denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter, to substitute the common name of Irishman'.

It is sometimes forgotten what a major break with the past such ideas were. Ireland's history in the 17th century was a series of land confiscations by the dominant political or religious faction. For example, the Dublin Jacobite parliament of 1689.

Tone's is the irreducible basic principle of secular Irish nationalism and Republicanism, and of course of Irish socialism. It is the foundation on which democratic Irish politics has been built



for two centuries. Anything less than that is inevitably a lapse from Irish nationalism into sectionalism, communalism, Catholic 'nationalism', and Catholic-Irish revanchism.

Without Tone's basic attitude Irish nationalism does not exist. It gives way to 'two-nations'-ism: for there is no middle ground. Either the Protestants are an equal part of the Irish nation, or they are not, they are excluded from it, and 'the nation' is defined as the same thing as the Catholic communities, North and South.

Today the Provos, having abandoned federalism, have lapsed back into history to before Wolfe Tone — back towards the politics of the Catholic Parliament of 1689. 'Remember 1690' is a popular Protestant slogan: it means, remember the Protestant victory over King James and the Catholics. Now 'Remember 1689' could well be the Catholic slogan!

Accepting the right to existence of a distinct community, and rejecting the alternative of conquering, subjugating or driving them out, implies a search to find ways to coexist with them and to take account of their concerns and fears in so far as that is possible. Even where a community like the Protestants is 100% identified with a colonial imperialism with which the majority community is at war for its liberation (and it isn't) consistent democrats will search

for formulas for coexistence that will have at least the possibility of breaking the minority community from imperialism.

A '1689' policy towards the minority of 'undoing the conquest', 'driving them out of the land', imposing alien rule on them — that of course would rule out any such approach.

Leaving aside the zig-zags of history, for the last 60 years the Protestants have seen in Southern Ireland the operation of a sectarian Catholic state, where laws have narrowly reflected Catholic doctrine and the priests have had tremendous power. They have seen their nightmare of Rome Rule in operation.

## **'A socialist united Ireland can only be created by the working class — including the Protestant workers. It therefore presupposes a programme to reconcile the Protestant and the Catholic workers'.**

Incorporation into this state as a permanent minority is what's on offer for them right now. That is what the Provos offer them in fact, whatever about the socialist and Republican rhetoric. The Provos are a Catholic movement, not only in the background of their members and supporters but also in their ideas. The eradication of Catholic sectarianism is our programme: it requires a tremendous revolution in attitudes in Ireland which hasn't happened yet.

So the only conceivable bourgeois united Ireland is one in which the special concerns of the Protestant community are taken full account of. A socialist united Ireland can only be created by the working class — including the Protestant workers. It therefore presupposes a programme to reconcile the Protestant and the Catholic workers.

The old Bolshevik policy is therefore acutely relevant to Ireland. I'll read out a quotation that appeared in SO, which I think expresses that policy.

"Insofar as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife, it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government which guarantees full equality of all nations and languages, which recognises no compulsory official language, which provides the people with schools where instruction is given in all the native languages, and the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any en-

croachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local self-government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local population".

This does not mean us accepting Catholic sectarianism or Protestant sectarianism within Catholic or Protestant areas. It means trying to find an answer to the immediate acute crisis on the basis of present-day realities. It would undermine sectarianism, because it would take the hardening antagonism out of Catholic/Protestant relations.

Jimmy Of course the Northern Ireland Catholics suffered injustice. Of course the result of partition has been to create an artificial Catholic minority in an artificial Six County state in place of the natural Protestant minority in all Ireland. As I say, I want to do everything I can to undo that — short of committing hara-kiri, short of telling the Protestant community to commit political suicide.

Jackie The problem, Tony, is that what you are proposing in fact, whatever you think you are proposing, is to make the Northern Ireland non-Catholics, Scots-Irish, 'British-Irish', or whatever name you choose, into an oppressed minority in 32-counties Ireland: to replace the oppression of half a million Catholics in the Six Counties with the oppression of one million Protestants in the 32 Counties.

Robert No thanks!

Patrick Part of the problem, Tony, is that you people in the British left think of the entire Protestant community as if they are all big and small Ian Paisleys. But lots of the most bitter opponents of a united Ireland are trade unionists who voted NILP or even CP at one time. The CP was proportionately a big party here during the war and after.

But you refuse to believe that there can be a rational basis for Protestants who are not bigots to oppose a united Ireland — and if necessary to fight against it.

There is a rational basis for it. That's the tragedy — and we may still be a long way from having experienced it in full. It is on one level a question of two rights in conflict, right against right. It's the right of the Protestants not to be — as they see it — engulfed in a Catholic state, versus the right of the Six County Catholics not to be an artificial minority in an artificial state.

There are probably a lot of Northern Ireland Protestants who would go along with much of what Robert, Jimmy and I are saying — the sort of people who have in the past voted NILP or who took part in the mass, mainly Protestant, unemployment demonstrations of 20 years ago. Or who gave Muriel Tang 684 votes in East Belfast last

June.

Socialists who support the Provisionals and their operational goal of coercing the Six County Protestants into a Catholic-dominated united Ireland (or coercing Britain into coercing them) need to give us some answers. What do you say to us, Tony?

Anne-Marie It's nonsense that what the Provisionals want is a united Catholic Ireland. They are socialists.

Tony I criticise the Provisionals' policy of consciously antagonising the Protestant workers. But the answer is to build an alternative revolutionary leadership to wage the national struggle on a socialist basis.

Jackie Yes, you can deny that what is actually on offer is a Catholic Ireland. You can do that on one of two possible bases. You can knowingly tell lies, beginning with telling lies to yourself. If you'll forgive me for saying so, Tony and Anne-Marie, that's what you do: you couldn't hold your position otherwise, not without telling yourselves ideological lies. Or you can fantasise that it will be a transformed and different Ireland as a result of the struggle. Well, I'm pretty sure it would be different — but not like you think it would! The average Protestant worker will not believe you. The present struggle is a Catholic struggle. That's a shame, but you must face facts. The Southern state is still Catholic-dominated.

Mick What I'd like to know is, on what principle would we advocate self-abnegating 'descent' by the Protestants into a Catholic Ireland?

Democracy? Such suppression of minorities is not our version of democracy. Anti-imperialism? What anti-imperialism? The subjugation of the Protestant working class would mean the destruction of the real anti-imperialist potential in Ireland.

Tony If we said, make it a socialist Ireland, Protestant workers might be won over.

Mick But that means winning Northern and Southern workers to it. I think Jimmy and Robert are representative of Protestant workers when they say that they don't see why a united Ireland has much to do with socialism.

Tony Well, they should see why! The Catholics are oppressed and in revolt; the only sure way they can escape from oppression by the Protestants and their British masters is in a united Ireland. We should support their historically justified demand for a united Ireland.

Jimmy Why? There is at least a good chance — and I believe it's a high probability — that immediately or quickly a united Ireland would lead to the replacement of the oppression of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland with an oppressed Protestant minority in the South. You exchange an oppres-



Nationalist graffiti

sed, frustrated, and alienated minority of half a million for a similarly alienated Protestant minority of one million in a united Ireland.

It seems to me that you have no appreciation of the fundamental problem, which (leaving the relationship with Britain aside) is of a Protestant minority. You want to fight imperialism. You go along impressionistically. But your politics are either short-sighted or a hypocritical form of Catholic nationalism. The Provisionals are pretty blatant Catholic nationalists — and only those who want to be taken in will believe otherwise. A United Ireland is not a solution to anything. It's Irish bourgeois nationalism.

**Jackie** I'm not sure about that. Because the Catholic and Protestant communities are so intermeshed, the best solution is a united Ireland with autonomy for the Protestants and probably also with some renewed links between Britain and Ireland — links that would not block the desire of the Irish majority for independence.

**Mick** Given the realities of modern Irish history, I think it is, as far as it goes, perfectly reasonable for the Protestants not to want to go into the South, where they risk being the equivalent there of what the Catholics have been in the Six Counties. The Protestant workers are socially vulnerable, unlike a lot of the 26 Counties Protestants after 1921, who were upper-class.

**Tony** But we want a socialist Ireland! Ireland will be reshaped and changed beyond recognition in the struggle, transmuted into something else by the heat of the revolutionary upheaval.

**Jimmy** The option of going into a secular Ireland is not in existence. Face facts, man, for god's sake! There is no feasible action in unity with the Catholics on offer to the Protestants to change that.

Of course there was no possibility, either, of Catholic activity together with the majority of Protestants to change their condition. There was some chance of unity with a section of Protestants for civil rights in the late '60s — but the Paisleyites and the Provos put paid to that, too.

**Mick** What choice did the Catholics have but to revolt? That's the tragedy — right against right, community against community, irreconcilability and incompatibility.

**Tony** You are incredibly defeatist! The Provos have got the British on the run, they call for a united socialist Ireland. And all you can see is looming tragedy. You need revolutionary optimism, not petty bourgeois pessimism!

**Mick** Trotsky used to say that people who could only remain revolutionaries by keeping their eyes shut from reality weren't much good, and he was right. In fact Trotsky said they were harmful because they substituted fantasies for appreciation of reality. Instead of facing the real problems and defining revolutionary tasks from the real situation, they fantasised themselves imaginatively into a different situation. At best that renders you irrelevant.

Look, for one example of this, at the history of the current now calling itself the USFI (and its splinters like the Lambertists, Healyites etc.) Always 'revolutionary perspectives', always optimism, every conference recording a 'new rise in the world revolution'...

I do think that everything Jimmy and Robert have said is logical from their point of view, and that you have no answer for them — unless you can convince them to plug into your technicolour fantasy world.

You know my answer to the basic problem they pose: why should the Northern Ireland workers consent to submit themselves to green nationalism (and green Tory nationalism at

that, which is what's on offer). They shouldn't — and anyway they won't.

The solution is in the formula: self-determination for the Irish people as a whole, with as much autonomy for the Protestant minority as is compatible with the rights of the majority.

**Jimmy** Certainly that answers my objection about Catholic domination. That form of united Ireland would logically be acceptable. But it's a bit abstract. How is it to be brought about? And isn't it a bit late — 12 years into the war? It doesn't fill me with much enthusiasm, I'm afraid.

**'Autonomy for the Protestants... is the only conceivable form of a bourgeois united Ireland, and very probably the only form too even of a socialist united Ireland. It is not a miracle cure...'**

**Mick** I didn't expect it to. It isn't a new idea. De Valera started talking about it in the early '20s. And it's no panacea. In and of itself it won't create a mass following or be a miracle cure for Northern Ireland. But it is the only conceivable form of united Ireland — certainly of a bourgeois united Ireland, and very probably the only form too even of a socialist united Ireland. In any case, if the distinct Protestant community want autonomy under socialism, they should have the right to it. Therefore it must remain a basic part of our programme.

**Tony** Look, the people here are obviously more likely to agree with John O'Mahony's pro-imperialist and defeatist position than with our anti-imperialist position on Ireland. But I don't understand you, Jackie: you've been an anti-imperialist for a long time.

**Jackie** Well, I'm an anti-imperialist, of course, Tony. But, if I've understood it properly, the discussion in SO hasn't been an argument between pro- and anti-imperialists, or between reformists and revolutionaries — though I know people get carried away in the heat of polemic. As I've read it, anyway, it's been an argument about how sensible it is to see the situation in Northern Ireland in terms of a classic anti-imperialist or anti-colonial struggle.

**Tony** What? This is outrageous! I thought you were a Trotskyist!

**Jackie** Well, I think I am a Trotskyist. But let me finish, Tony.

The discussion in SO has been concretised as a discussion on 'federalism' rather than on the less specific formula I would favour — recognition of the general right of autonomy for the Protestant minority, leaving the details to be filled in later. This has happened, I suppose, because of the Provos' discarded 'federal solution', and your discussion of the Catholic sectarian implications of them dropping it.

In fact the Provos' version of 'federalism' was always a peculiar one: they proposed a Northern sub-state consisting of the nine counties of old Ulster. I did not and would not support this form of federalism. Nevertheless it did contain the core idea of Protestant autonomy which could have been refined and rendered more rational in negotiation and discussion. It was therefore basically on the right lines, broadly progressive. At least it held the door open. That was what I supported and continue to support in the Provos' now-discarded federal policy.

But I think that to focus on federalism is to distort and crudify the argument. The general formula SO has used for many years is much better. The rest is concrete detail which would have to be worked out by discussion and by a vast range of local consultation.

**Tony** Consultation with whom? With the pro-imperialist Protestants? With Paisley, perhaps?

**Jackie** Yes, Tony, with the Protestants, who else? It might not be just 'federalism' in the sense of a Protestant block and a Catholic one. There might have to be all sorts of degrees of autonomy for 'alien' pockets within the predominantly Catholic and Protestant areas.

**Tony** Christ, you're worse than O'Mahony!

**Jackie** Well, I do my best, Tony.



RUC block Loyalist march

## Session 2: Does autonomy mean defending privileges and a foothold for imperialism?

**Tony** Let me try to state my position.

The Protestants do have a right to be here. They have a right to be equal citizens. But they do not have a right to retain their sectarian privileges over the Catholics, to retain their sectarian state, or to give imperialism a foothold against the anti-imperialist struggle of the majority of the Irish people.

I'm for democratic rights for Protestants in a united Ireland — the right to practise their religion, and so on. I'm for divorce and abortion rights. But that's different from autonomy.

You talk about autonomy giving the Protestants the right to defend their separate identity. But what is that separate identity apart from religion? It's nothing but sectarian privilege!

I don't know how this autonomy would work. But however the Protestant area was defined, there would be a lot of Catholics within it. So O'Mahony's scheme means abandoning the Belfast Catholics to the sec-

tionary rule of a Paisleyite regional administration!

Autonomy means allowing the Protestants to keep their privileges, allowing them to keep their sectarian state in some form, and giving imperialism a continued hold over Ireland through this Protestant sub-state. It's a reformist solution, a readjustment which allows imperialism to defend its essential interests, rather than a programme for a revolutionary victory against imperialism.

That's why I'm against autonomy. I do recognise the fears of the Protestant workers about Catholic sectarianism, but the answer to those fears is to build a revolutionary leadership North and South which fights for a socialist, not a capitalist, united Ireland.

Let the Protestants have their democratic rights. Let them have their religion. I'm no Catholic bigot! But the right to any sort of local autonomy —

no. That would leave them their privileges. The essence of their entire position is privilege. That's why they might want autonomy or self-determination. And if it does not guarantee them that privilege, they won't want it.

**Jackie** They would want it – minimally as a guarantee that they would not be steamrollered.

Protestant privilege over the Catholics is a serious, indeed an immense, problem. But the problem is fundamentally separable from Protestant state power – the Protestants haven't had state power since 1972, remember!

The core of the problem is the solidarity of one community with its own and against those felt to be aliens – threatening aliens – in their midst.

**Patrick** Clearly there could be no form of federalism or autonomy within a united Ireland which allowed any sort of formal discrimination. But unless you physically break up the Protestant social structures there will have to be a long haul to eradicate discrimination based on communal solidarity and communal hostility.

To identify the process of breaking down discrimination with the IRA war is to say: conquer, subjugate and disperse the Protestants. That is an ultra-chauvinist programme.

**Tony** There then. You admit federalism or autonomy would mean accepting continued privileges for the Protestants! I knew it.

**Patrick** I admit that there is a real problem. But Protestant and Catholic communalism is not inextricably tied to state power or even local government power. It predates Partition, and it is logically separate from Partition.

Today it is partly linked to local government power. But the only way a single unitary Irish state would eradicate it would be to abolish all forms of local government for the Protestant areas.

Discrimination doesn't just rest on provincial or local government patronage: the problem is as profound as the communal antagonism. As Marxists we should see the solution as linked to an easing of communal tension and to the improvement of the material conditions of life.

**Jackie** One of the major reasons why the miserable and petty privileges of the Protestants were so important in Northern Ireland – the Protestant workers came very cheap! – was the mass poverty and unemployment. Trotsky once truly said that the greatest of all possible privileges is a dry crust of bread when everyone around you is starving.

Conditions in Northern Ireland today are worse than at any time since the '30s. The Protestant workers feel it most. Many of their old privileges have jack-knifed and turned into their opposite, as they have been hit harder

by the collapse of industry. If it were not for the war and the communal antagonisms, the economic conditions in Northern Ireland would lead to mass protests from the Protestants.

**Mick** I think you're probably right about that, though you can't be sure. There were some big mainly Protestant anti-unemployment marches in the early '60s, weren't there?

**Tony** I told you – you downgrade the national question. You wish it would go away!

**Mick** I'm calculating and reasoning about the world around me as I think it actually is. You refuse to. You deal in symbolic shadow plays, not real class struggle, or national liberation struggle.

**Jackie** The Trotskyist answer to the basic problem of poverty, discrimination and privilege is clear and obvious: transitional demands, to build houses, create jobs, develop public works, etc.

## **'The Protestant workers are cast in the role of the metropolitan workers, and the Catholics in the role of the Third World people. It is utter and absolute nonsense! You cannot characterise the Northern Ireland Protestants entirely in terms of privileges'.**

**Mick** O'Mahony and others put out such ideas in the days of the civil rights movement, when inevitably divisive, though just, slogans were raised by the civil rights and student activists like 'one man, one vote', 'one man, one house', and 'one man, one job'.

Inevitably the Protestant workers thought they were faced with losing what they had, and were very hostile.

Whether you like it or not, the war now makes any unity on the basis of economic transitional demands near-impossible. Before, it was a question of the Protestants' vested interests; now that the grim reaper Thatcher is leveling down hundreds of thousands of 'Protestant' jobs, it is the nationalist form of the Catholic revolt.

I don't condemn the Catholic revolt,

Tony. You mistake defining its negative features for condemning it.

**Anne-Marie** That's another distinction we don't recognise. Of course you condemn it. You betray your basic wishes and sympathies with such ideas. You are a workerist! You don't see the national question as central.

**Tony** As I say in my document – let me quote it exactly:.

"Of course we don't want a blood-bath. We want the best conditions for the struggle for independence – that means the least lives lost. But the struggle for independence is a precondition for the development of the Irish working class for social revolution."

That's the permanent revolution for Ireland. Protestant privileges must be smashed.

**Patrick** I think you misevaluate the question of privilege.

This is very important in understanding the division in the Northern Ireland working class between Catholic and Protestant. It has no bearing on the social relations of the Orange workers to the capitalists.

If I didn't know you to be a long-time Trotskyist, Tony, I'd think you had Maoist tendencies the way you talk about the Northern Ireland working class, which is mainly Protestant.

All sorts of Maoists condemn the working class in the advanced countries as privileged exploiters of the peoples of the Third World. Some of the stuff I've read by British romantics who support the Provos reproduces that pattern for Northern Ireland. The Protestants, including the Protestant workers, are cast in the role of the metropolitan workers, and the Catholics in the role of the Third World people. It is utter and absolute nonsense!

More than that: privileges are important for the Protestant working class. But you cannot characterise the Northern Ireland Protestant population entirely in those terms. If you do that you are abusing an idea that is very important in understanding the split in the working class by elevating it to a general explanation. To use the idea of Protestant privilege as a general explanation takes us back to the political time before Wolfe Tone. That's what it implies, anyway. We are back to the position Jackie raised at the beginning of the discussion: do you accept that the Protestants have the right to be here, or don't you?

For of course the primal Protestant 'privileges' came from the act of displacing the Catholics. It was this that gave the Protestant rural community a fundamental privilege, out of which everything else grew.

So which is it? Do they have the right to be here, or don't they? Does their ill-treatment of the Catholics invalidate those rights all Republicans since Wolfe Tone have accepted for

Protestants — the basic right to be here? Does it lead us, in the fight against Protestant privilege, to advocate 'undoing the conquest' by subjugating the Protestants and thus destroying the historic 'privilege' on which so much has been built? How far back must the wiping out of Protestant privilege go?

Implicitly the Provisionals' answer here is to subjugate the Protestants. In any case they now explicitly leave themselves no other option. This approach is the direct opposite of any sort of socialist perspective — the perspective of working-class unity to create a new society.

For it is the politics of redivision of the inadequate social resources that now exist and the politics of narrow nationalism and communalism.

I'm for the Catholic community — but I'm a socialist first. And I think Wolfe Tone was right and Gerry Adams wrong.

Adams can spout socialism and vague leftism for the British left as long as he likes. But in Ireland Adams stands for a narrow Catholic sectarian approach to politics. That's another reality you have to face up to, Tony.

**Jackie** To get back to the point, even the 'Trotskyist' left does not differentiate from the immediate objectives in relation to the Protestants of the Provo movement. But the entire Catholic political struggle is, for the Protestant — even the socialist Protestant worker, like Jimmy or Robert here — aimed at coercing them towards the status of a permanent minority. We can convince Protestant workers to support equality, civil rights, class unity — but we cannot conceivably convince them to adopt the Catholic viewpoint.

In reality equality is not on offer now to the Protestants — what is on offer is descent into second-class citizenship in a Catholic Ireland.

Individual Protestants, perhaps attracted by socialist rhetoric or revulsion at Protestant sectarianism, can go over to the Catholic viewpoint. Such a one was Ronnie Bunting, son of a one-time prominent Paisleyite: he joined People's Democracy, and was reputedly Chief of Staff of the INLA at the time of his assassination a couple of years ago. The Protestant community will never make such a choice. They will fight to the last breath against it.

**Tony** You are still missing the point. We should fight for a socialist Ireland, and see the Catholic movement and the IRA as part of the permanent revolution.

**Mick** The option of going into a socialist united Ireland does not exist, nor is it conceivably going to come into being by any development of the current IRA war. You, Tony, as usual, I'm afraid, together with lots of others, live on fantasies that the present IRA/Catholic movement is in its logic socialist. Try explaining that to the average Protestant worker!

**Tony** Your trouble is that you don't believe in the permanent revolution for Ireland! All these calculations and considerations you outline are mistaken because you see the picture statically. You make calculations with the existing quantities and the relationships now existing between them. That's not dialectical, comrade! Everything will be changed in the struggle. New options will arise as the struggle develops. We advocate a clear socialist solution. We offer Protestant workers the option of equality in a socialist Ireland in which the power of the Catholic church will be broken.

### **'Bloody sectarian civil war which would repartition Ireland and set the working class back decades appears in your fantasised political vision as a liberating anti-imperialist socialist revolution'**

**Jimmy** Of course, Tony, I know that what you want instead of capitalism, including foreign capital investment, is a working-class takeover from the capitalists. That's what completely mystifies me, though. I thought you Trotskyists believe that the working class is central to all this — that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself', as Marx and Engels put it over a hundred years ago.

If only the working class can win socialism, then inescapably the central concern of your politics must be the working class: working-class unity, and not physical force on principle and war on England now even though a big part of the Irish working class stands between the petty bourgeois nationalists and England, and is prepared to fight to stop England making any concessions.

**Patrick** Perhaps I'm naive or even Kautskyite, but you seem to believe that the socialist revolution will be made — or initiated — in Ireland by a small military elite, supported by a smallish fraction of the people of Ireland and opposed by most of the Northern Ireland working class. You seem to think that the Catholic movement can expropriate economic imperialism in the same act as driving Britain out of the country and if necessary driving the Protestants into Belfast Lough.

**Mick** Of course Jimmy's right on this. I want socialism. I want to expropriate Irish, British and international

capitalism. I want the workers to take over. But that's not what you're talking about, Tony.

**Patrick** Because you make a fetish of the armed struggle and don't look at it concretely, you don't suspect that the armed struggle has become one of the problems. The existing armed struggle works totally against the possibility that the working class in Northern Ireland, or Ireland, can carry through a socialist revolution, because it sharpens the divisions in the working class.

You construct fantasies in your head from elements in reality abstracted from their context, and those fantasies then harden like scales on your eyes, and prevent you looking at the reality.

Bloody sectarian civil war which would repartition Ireland and set the working class back decades (and leave England in the North) appears in your fantasised political vision as a liberating anti-imperialist socialist revolution.

**Jackie** And let me add a small matter of fact. If the imperialism you are fighting in Ireland is represented there by foreign investment, then Britain is not now the main enemy.

Consider the following facts. Between 1960 and 1978 656 manufacturing enterprises from overseas set up with help from the Industrial Development Authority. Of the 656, 215 were from the US, 176 from the UK, 99 from West Germany, 37 from Holland, 21 from Switzerland, 18 from Sweden, 17 from France, and the rest from Japan, Canada, etc. (In the late '70s foreign-owned firms provided only one quarter of all jobs: so don't go telling me that there is no Irish bourgeoisie!)

What has driving out Britain from the North got to do with changing that situation? What has a willingness to try to conquer the Protestants because they are 'pro-imperialist' got to do with it?

**Robert** And who says the Protestants are 'pro-imperialist'? The US is the biggest imperialist power in the world — and, as Jackie just told us, the biggest power in terms of investment in Ireland — and US policy is to push Britain into pushing us Protestants into a united Ireland.

The EEC has a similar attitude. And I reckon the British boss class would love to dispose of us to Dublin if they could. They've been stopped only by the pressure of the Protestant workers here. We're the people who have defeated the plans of imperialism!

**Jackie** You're overdoing the argument a bit, Robert! You know that most Protestant workers vote OUP or DUP. That's not very anti-imperialist. But then voting SDLP isn't either.

**Anne-Marie** And voting Sinn Fein?

**Robert** Vote for SDLPers with guns rather than SDLPers without? That, too, is not very anti-imperialist.



**Jackie** The point is that 'pro-imperialism' and 'anti-imperialism' are concepts which don't have much grip on the situation.

If expropriating foreign capital under a working-class government is the task, then the attitude 'smash the Protestants, who are the imperialist garrison in Ireland' is not irrelevant. It is positively harmful. Only the working class can expropriate Irish and foreign capital. We need workers' unity.

**Tony** You're still not being Marxist. You can't be a Marxist unless you are first and foremost an anti-imperialist.

Plainly you don't want to fight imperialism. You are just rationalising your pro-imperialism. You are bending under pressure of the British state. You don't want a united Ireland.

All you Protestants are pro-imperialist. You must be either pro-imperialist or with the Republicans.

**Robert** Of course I don't want to go into a united Ireland. Didn't we explain at the beginning? It would mean exchanging a one million Protestant minority in a united Ireland for a half-million Catholic one in a divided Ireland.

**Tony** I knew it!

**Robert** But I am a socialist, and an anti-imperialist too. The point is that the Northern Ireland situation cannot be explained in terms of imperialism and colonialism — whatever about Ireland's terrible past under English rule.

**Tony** No, you're not an anti-imperialist, and therefore you're not a socialist either. You don't want to fight the Tories. You don't believe in permanent revolution for Ireland.

If you understood that the national question can grow over into the socialist revolution, then you'd understand that you should subordinate your petty sectional interests to the majority nationalism. The only road to working-class unity and socialism in Ireland is for the Protestants to accept the nationalism of the Catholic majority, now represented by the Provisionals. That's the only road to socialism in Ireland — finish the bourgeois revolution by solving the national question, just like in China and Vietnam.

**Jackie** As you like. In your notion of a socialist revolution in Ireland — something made by a military elite! — then of course I'm not a socialist. And the same with imperialism. You seem to think anti-imperialism is anti-colonialism. Even if your view on the Irish situation as a colonial one were true — and it's simply ridiculous — that would not be an adequate view of imperialism.

Lenin, who lived 60 years ago, when it was a world of colonial empires and neo-mercantilist trade blocs policed by imperial military force, had a far more complex and comprehensive conception. He distinguished clearly between the struggle against colonial-

ism and the struggle against economic imperialism. He was a 'nationalist', for national liberation, against colonialism, and an 'anti-nationalist', a working-class internationalist, against economic imperialism. Only the international working class could eradicate the economic mechanisms of imperialist exploitation. He denounced petty-bourgeois anti-imperialist economic nationalism as reactionary, retrogressive and not working-class policy. You are very close to endorsing it.

**Tony** No I'm not.

**Jackie** And what about the facts I cited?

**Tony** Facts! Whose facts? You can do anything with facts. I'll find my own facts. And what about James Connolly?

**Robert** Connolly would have been better off if he hadn't been a Republican.

**'You define the Protestants not as they are, a distinct segment of the Irish people, but as pro-imperialists who can be treated as imperialist agents, all the way to whatever degree of violence is necessary. That's a form of 'two-nations'-ism in my mind'.**

**Anne-Marie** You're bound to say that. Jo Quigley said the same thing at the SO summer school.

**Mick** Yes, I was there. John O'Mahony argued that this view was a-historical, and that Connolly was right to base himself on the revolutionary tradition of the Irish people, the Fenians, the land struggle, etc. That's a possible view. But this argument has no relevance now. Connolly was defeated. The Southern state is a straight bourgeois state.

**Tony** O'Mahony didn't mean it. He's just trying to cover his tracks. He's a two-nations man, you know.

**Jackie** I read a piece by John O'Mahony recently attacking the two-nations view as put by Jo Quigley.

**Tony** Ah, that's just track-covering as well. He's two-nations. As soon as I heard about the two-nations theory a couple of months ago, I knew it fitted O'Mahony's position like a glove. Take my word for it — watching O'Mahony I've learned all about the two nations theory.

**Jackie** There are lots of two-nations people around, that's true. But not just the sort you're thinking of, Tony, the people who say that the Protestants and the Catholics are two nations in Ireland, and that the Northern Ireland state embodies the Protestants' right to self-determination.

What about your own view on the Protestants — your willingness to advocate coercing us, conquering us, or even driving us out? What's that but a variant of 'two nations', but with the Protestants as a 'bad' nation?

You define us not as we are, a distinct segment of the Irish people, but as pro-imperialists who can be treated as imperialist agents, all the way to whatever degree of violence is necessary. That's a form of 'two-nations'-ism to my mind. It's not clearly and honestly defined, but that's the implication.

The Republicans, especially the 'lefts', hold that view. Tone or Connolly or even Pearse would not recognise them as Republicans.

**Tony** There you go again, denigrating my views. More pro-imperialism, more reformist rubbish.

But do you know that O'Mahony is a supporter of the 1922 Treaty between Britain and Ireland?

**Jackie** Really? I'm surprised. But wasn't it 1921?

**Tony** No, of course it was 1922, my document says that. And Britain partitioned Ireland in 1919, not 1920.

**Mick** In your article you also wrote that internment was brought in by the Labour government in 1974, not, as most of us believe, by the Tories in August 1971.

**Tony** I tell you, O'Mahony supported Collins and in fact he fought in the Free State Army in his native Clare.

**Mick** I never knew he was that old. He doesn't look a day over 60.

**Tony** They're all like that, well-preserved. Look at Reagan. You'd never guess how old he is, would you?

**Mick** I'm surprised.

**Tony** The best thing you could do is read 'The Permanent Revolution'. It's all about Ireland — if you know how to read it.

**Patrick** I think this conversation has gone as far as it can usefully go. I suggest we take an hour's break for dinner and have another session afterwards.



A Labour conference delegate holds up a plastic bullet

## Session 3: Permanent revolution, Ireland, and imperialism

**Anne-Marie** The problem with you people is that you reject permanent revolution for Ireland. You don't understand the centrality of the national question for Ireland. You think that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is finished. You don't understand that the national question can grow over into the socialist revolution. Because of that you look for solutions to the existing national conflict that will get it out of the way and allow the class struggle to develop.

**Tony** Exactly. And therefore you argue for a reformist solution to the national question, and not a revolutionary one. Like De Valera in 1922, you don't want to struggle. You want a settlement, not revolution.

As I said: "The struggle for independence is a precondition for the development of the Irish working class for social revolution". That's permanent revolution.

**Mick** These are lovely, familiar and reassuring generalities. What do they mean for the concrete situation? God knows.

You have a strange view of permanent revolution. Your document says that if O'Mahony

"did accept that permanent revolution applied to Ireland, then presumably he would connect the fight for reforms to the fight for state power! But since he argues the opposite position — that Ireland is a fully-developed capitalist

state — he can put forward a reformist 'realistic' solution".

So we argue revolutionary politics only in underdeveloped countries, and never in fully-developed capitalist countries?

**Jackie** And do you seriously mean to say that Ireland is not a fully-developed capitalist state — or two states? What is it then?

In fact it is an advanced capitalist country, fully capitalist, integrated into West European capitalism as an equal partner, though economically a weak one compared with most EEC states.

Ireland is an exporter of capital, and has been since before its independence. Who rules if not the bourgeoisie? There is no agrarian problem — or not one different from that of France, the classical country of the bourgeois revolution.

The problem is a problem of a split Irish bourgeoisie, one section of which (rooted in the Protestant community) wanted different relations with the old British Empire than those favoured by the Catholic bourgeoisie.

**Tony** So there is no national question in Ireland? Ireland hasn't been convulsed for the last 15 years? And you accuse me of fantasy! You use a mass of words to avoid supporting the Republicans and to deny that a solution to the national question is the central precondition for an Irish socialist working-class revolution.

All that is the result of your denial of

the permanent revolution for Ireland.

**Jackie** When you say that national liberation is the precondition, that is not Trotsky's permanent revolution, but its logical, political, social and historical opposite, the Stalinist and Menshevik stages theory, which is also the central theory of populist Irish Republicans.

**Mick** It's not Gaelic you speak in Oxford, but it's not Marxism or its Trotskyist dialect either. For sure you speak a language Trotsky wouldn't know — except in the mouths of the bitter enemies of his politics.

If you are right that the success of the Catholic-nationalist struggle being waged by the Provos is the precondition for working-class action in any part of Ireland, then the situation is hopeless.

The only solution is to break out into Ireland-wide class politics. The national question in all its existing variants is divisive. In its green nationalist variant that you support, it is divisive and alien to our politics.

Trotsky once defined the permanent revolution as "the reconstruction of the nation under the leadership of the working class". In Ireland you should more accurately talk of negative permanent revolution if — as you do — you see permanent revolution as the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the solving of the Irish national question to the satisfaction of the Catholic community. Negative permanent revolution because the national question divides the Irish working class, without whom there can be no revolution, permanent or any other sort.

Far from Ireland needing the completion of the bourgeois revolution — agrarian revolution, and achievement of national unity against semi-feudal, pre-capitalist particularism — Ireland is more free of pre-capitalist relics than Britain is.

As the saying goes, a revolution, even the peculiar Irish variant of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, is good for something after all.

**Jackie** After all the British bourgeois-democratic state still exists with the forms and the trappings of the old feudal state. Britain is a monarchy, Ireland a republic.

The Stalinists have spent 50 and more years trying to justify formulas such as yours to avoid placing the working class at the centre of the stage with its own programme and banner. They say national liberation first, not only for Ireland, but for Britain now and for pre-Nazi Germany. That has nothing to do with Trotskyist politics.

**Tony** You are a Kidronite! You don't believe imperialism exists. You reject the struggle for national liberation.

Since you don't believe that there is the possibility of developing the present Northern Ireland struggle to a socialist revolution, you are a reformist.

In my document I show at great

length that O'Mahony's federalism is a direct response to the interest that the left reformists have shown in the last three or four years in finding a reformist solution. O'Mahony rushes to help them.

**Mick** But he argued for autonomy or federalism as long ago as 1969.

**Tony** You still forget about imperialism! Every defeat inflicted on British imperialism is a blow for freedom throughout the world. It weakens the imperialist camp. It encourages the Nicaraguans, the Salvadoreans, the oppressed Argentinians. If you weaken British imperialism, you will also weaken the forces of reaction in Ireland and weaken the Irish bourgeoisie too, who are only Britain's stooges. If we can beat the British state, we can easily take care of its Irish stooges, north and south of the Border. You will unleash a whole series of struggles throughout the world which will affect Ireland.

In that way you will open up the road to socialism in Ireland. The present struggle of the Provos links up with the world struggle against imperialism and for socialism.

If the Protestants can be persuaded to side against British imperialism, well and good. If not then they should be coerced, unless you can think of a third alternative.

The armed struggle against imperialism is the thing. It is qualitatively different from any negotiated settlement, even one that agrees a united Ireland, of whatever kind. Any talk of democratic rearrangement that would conciliate the Protestants would undercut the armed struggle, and is thus pro-imperialist.

**Mick** We must have blood! Didn't the great Republican Patrick Pearse himself greet World War 1 with the words that bloodshed is a cleansing and ennobling thing, and that the tired old earth needed to be refreshed with blood?

**Jimmy** Yes, and James Connolly said he was 'a blithering idiot'.

**Jackie** You shouldn't go along with the new fashion to denigrate Pearse. Give or take a bit of foolishness here and there, Pearse was much bigger than those who make plaster-of-Paris statues of him. Our schools still haven't caught up with the proposed teaching methods he used at the turn of the cen-

**Tony** Bloodshed is always part of revolution and anti-imperialism. We shouldn't be afraid of it. You can't make omelettes without breaking eggs. What does the fate of one million Irish people matter in the scale of these gigantic revolutionary perspectives? In the scale of the defeat we can help inflict on the Tory government?

**Mick** That is British nationalism, comrade! Upside-down and inside-out British nationalism, but it's got the red, white and blue smeared all over it

when you say that defeating the Tory government is more important than anything that happens in Ireland.

**Tony** No it's not — the main enemy is always at home. And in any case you are wrong, comrade! On the other side of the great struggles I'm talking about it would not be a Catholic-dominated Ireland north or south, but a socialist Ireland. We'd have a Red Belfast in a Soviet Ireland! That's what we have to say insistently to the Protestant workers.

**Jackie** Excuse me while I go to the bookshelf and find Trotsky's collected writings for 1935. I'm opening it where Trotsky deals with the plebiscite in the Saarland.

The Saar, you remember, was German, but was separated from Germany after the First World War and put under French administration.

In 1935 a plebiscite was held to let the Saarlanders decide if they wanted to join the German state. In the event they voted overwhelmingly to do that.

The plebiscite posed a dilemma for the left. The Saar was German, and should not have been separated from Germany. According to the national principle, it was a clear-cut question:

**'Every defeat inflicted on British imperialism is a blow for freedom throughout the world. It weakens the imperialist camp. If you weaken British imperialism, you will also weaken the forces of reaction in Ireland'.**

vote yes. But Germany was Nazi Germany: by voting yes, the Saarlanders were voting to submit themselves to fascist dictatorship which would smash the labour movement.

Trotsky thought these were more important considerations than unity of the German nation, and advocated voting no to reunification. However, the Stalinists, for a variety of reasons which need not concern us here, chose to take the same approach as Tony.

**Tony** Outrageous!

**Jackie** Bear with me, Tony. To the immediate concrete dilemma facing the German workers of the Saar, the Stalinists answered with the slogan: 'Eine rote Saar in Soviet Deutschland' — a red Saar in Soviet Germany.

The German CP was smashed to bits, the German working class was atomised, and murderous fascism was firmly in control. But only traitors, reformists, Trotsky-fascists and running dogs of the imperialists would take account of

this and answer the question posed to the Saarland workers in terms of making a choice within the limited options.

So: 'An Beal Feirste Dearg ar Eireann Soviet!' — a red Belfast in Soviet Ireland? (Close observers of my English will know how to take my rusty Gaelic). We need answers to the real problems and to the real situation.

In the Marxist arsenal as distinct from that of the sectarian socialists we have all sorts of limited — reformist, if you like — proposals, demands, democratic and transitional proposals to make a bridge between where we are now and socialism. We also try to answer concrete questions, and not take refuge in private fantasies.

Tony, you're abandoning the workers who can't join you in a private world in which the vision of a bloody sectarian holocaust in Northern Ireland is made acceptable by waving the magic wand of permanent revolution.

**Mick** I might point out that Tony is using the same method as Militant. If you use the general formula 'a socialist Ireland' as the immediate answer to every immediate question, then that cuts both ways. You can fantasise that socialism is built into the logic of the present Catholic struggle. Or you can come to the conclusion that, since it isn't, we should oppose the limited struggle actually going on.

**Tony** No, I'm not like the Pabloites who say that the struggle will automatically develop to socialism. I fight for an alternative revolutionary leadership, which will develop the struggle according to the logic of permanent revolution.

It would be sectarian civil war only in appearance. Again, you are being undialectical. You can't see the wood for the trees, or the revolutionary significance of the struggle. Be dialectical: subordinate the parts to the whole. There would be not a sectarian bloodbath but permanent revolution.

You have the wrong conceptual framework, comrade, and you are terrified and depressed by things which a Marxist who knows we live in the epoch of wars and revolutions takes in his stride. He knows the inner reality is different from what he sees around him.

Don't you Proddies have something in your bible like: 'Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil. For the Lord is my shepherd: he lays me down in green pastures'. Or something like that?

There you are. We have something in common after all — except that I live in the real world, and your head is stuck up in the clouds. I'm a Marxist, you see — that's what keeps my feet on the ground.

**Jackie** I'm afraid I haven't got much of a head for your sort of dialectical thinking. My mind is rather practical

and empirical, and plodding reasonableness is the highest I aim for. Perhaps it's got something to do with the Protestant Reformation and the bourgeois culture it produced in England and Scotland and Northern Ireland.

So I can't make any sense of what you have just said. What is imperialism? Export of capital? Colonialism? Or both? But Ireland and England have been tied together since the time England was Norman feudal, with a French-speaking ruling class. The English language we speak today had yet to develop. That was long before capitalism or modern imperialism.

The Protestant colonies in Ireland were put down before the English bourgeois revolution and consolidated in the course of that revolution, in the 1640s and 1688-91. When Ulster was planted the English colonial empire consisted of a couple of feeble colonies on the eastern shore of America. For centuries, until well into the 20th century, the Anglo-Irish, or anglicised Irish, ruling class was fully integrated as part of the UK ruling class. Even the Irish Free State was a privileged white dominion in the British Empire or Commonwealth in the '20s and '30s, while the African countries were Crown Colonies.

Southern Ireland showed its independence by remaining neutral in World War 2. Even so the separation between Britain and the 26 Counties is still less than total: Irish people when they choose to go to England continue to have, effectively, UK citizenship. You cannot explain Anglo-Irish relations, or such complex questions as the Protestant-Catholic relationship, in terms of modern imperialism or capitalism.

It's much more ancient and complex. The two peoples are too entwined, despite the conflicts. Did you know that Mazzini, the great exponent of the national principle in Europe in the mid 19th century, denied that the Irish were a distinct people at all!

Now that's for the Irish to decide, whether they are distinct, and they have decided that they are. The conflicts and problems between the

two countries began before capitalism, colonial empires, and modern British imperialism, and they have outlasted the British Empire.

Britain retreated from a world-wide Empire with comparatively few upsets. Yet you think that Britain would not be able to survive a reorganisation of Ireland. Britain would maintain its close links with Ireland, and probably develop closer links once the Northern problem was solved. Both countries would be in the EEC. Yet you think that reunification and independence for Ireland would shatter the British state.

A curious notion! It hasn't anything to do with the real world, as I'm aware of it. Perhaps I am wearing the wrong ideological spectacles.

You seem to have a 'camel's back' theory: Britain survived the loss of a world empire, but the solution on the basis of a united Ireland of a small-scale war that drains it of resources will be the last straw!

Maybe I was wrong when I talked about ideological spectacles. You can only hold such a fantastic view of Ireland if you yourself think not of real things and real events but in terms of symbols. It's the symbolic importance of Britain's defeat that will be important. I suspect that not only most Protestants, but also most Catholics and even most Provos, don't see it like that, and would say harsh words against your approach.

Patrick The Provos call for a negotiated settlement. They have talked to the British. They call for a declaration of intent to withdraw by the British, and say they will stop the war if they get one. Plainly they are unworthy of you, comrade Tony, and all your perspectives!

I find your attitude to the military struggle unexpected from a Trotskyist and yet strangely familiar. Then I recognised it. You are an old-fashioned physical-force Republican! I never knew Marxists have that view of violence and armed struggle — the

view that it is purifying or all-transforming, or that it transmutes the sort of petty-bourgeois populist politics the Provisionals have into really revolutionary working-class politics. I thought that was a species of Bakuninism — or, in the modern word, Fanonism.

**'You cannot explain Anglo-Irish relations, or such complex questions as the Protestant-Catholic relationship, in terms of modern imperialism or capitalism. It's much more ancient and complex'.**

Jackie Connolly rejected this view. I think I can find the reference on my bookshelf.

"Ireland occupies a position among the nations of the earth unique... in the possession of what is known as a physical force party — a party, that is to say, whose members are united upon no one point, and agreed upon no single principle, except the use of physical force as the sole means of settling the dispute between the people of this country and the governing power of Great Britain...

The latter-day high-falutin hillside man exalts into a principle that which the revolutionists of other countries have looked upon as a weapon, and in his gatherings prohibits all discussion of those principles which formed the main strength of his prototypes elsewhere and made the successful use of that weapon possible.

Our people have glided at different periods of the past century from moral force agitation, so called, into physical force rebellion, from constitutionalism into insurrectionism, meeting in each the same failure and the same disaster, and yet seem as far as ever from learning the great truth that neither method is ever likely to be successful until they first insist that a perfect agreement upon the end to be attained should be arrived at as a starting-point for all our efforts...

Every revolutionary movement in Ireland has drawn the bulk of its adherents from the ranks of disappointed followers of defeated constitutional movements. After having exhausted their constitutional efforts in striving to secure such a modicum of political power as would justify them to their own consciences in taking a place as loyal subjects of the British Empire, they, in despair, turn to thoughts of physical force as a means of attaining their ends.



Firemen at a bombed building



A young woman watches an Orange parade march through a predominantly Catholic area

**Their conception of what constitutes freedom was in no sense changed or revolutionised: they still believed in the political form of freedom which had been their ideal in their constitutional days; but no longer hoping for it from the Acts of the British Parliament, they swung over into the ranks of the 'physical force' men as the only means of attaining it".**

Forgive me, but I thought that was the Marxist attitude here. For example, Marxists don't make a fetish of Parliament. You don't bow down before it as a fetish; and you aren't scared to use it, like the anarchists (and Republicans) who make a negative fetish out of it. It's a tool, a weapon. Physical force is a tool, a weapon.

The Republican glorification of physical force on principle is one of the strangest things in politics, yet it is the irreducible dogma of all Republicans. Together with the parallel principle of abstention from Parliament even when elected, it does define the Republicans as a hybrid variety of anarchism. Frederick Engels accurately defined the small terrorist group of the '80s, the Invincibles, as Bakuninists.

I'm amazed that Tony should endorse their attitude and that of their modern counterparts, the Fanonists and so on.

Tony What it all comes down to is that you don't want to fight imperialism. You even think the South is free of imperialist domination, and independent!

Jackie Imperialism? In the South? I suppose you mean foreign investment. I really don't see what the IRA war has to do with that, or why you think a united Ireland — whether by agreement or on the basis of conquering and subduing the one million Protestants — would change that situation.

Since 1958 Southern Ireland has had an industrial revolution — and as a consequence has a massively increased working class and is transformed into a

**'The Republican glorification of physical force on principle is one of the strangest things in politics, yet it is the irreducible dogma of all Republicans. Marxists don't make a fetish of physical force. It is a tool, a weapon'.**

primarily urban country.

The Provos and the INLA denounce foreign investment and want to pull Ireland out of the EEC. Is that your programme against imperialism? Read your history books! From 1932-58 the policy of economic nationalism behind high tariff walls was operated by the Irish bourgeoisie. It led to a growth in employment for a while, but then to absolute stagnation. Irish goods produced behind high protective tariffs could not compete overseas. Nearly a thousand people a week — out of a population just under three million — left the 26 Counties throughout most of the '50s.

Foreign investment changed that. You forget that the Provos, INLA and so on are a pretty small minority in Ireland. Take the EEC, for example. Over 80% of the 26 Counties electorate voted to go into the EEC. The extreme nationalists haven't got a hope in hell of winning the Irish people back to the discarded and discredited policies of economic nationalism and isolationism.

Consider this as a paradox: many more Protestants in Northern Ireland voted against the EEC in the 1975 plebiscite than Catholics in the Southern plebiscite! If that's your definition of nationalism, then the Protestant North is once more in the lead!

Personally I have no doubt that a return to economic nationalism in Ireland would be completely reactionary. All the recorded facts show that the vast majority, and especially in the South, think so too.

**Tony** All this talk about me having a fetish of armed struggle, but you haven't dealt with my real point: autonomy is a reformist solution, it's a programme for a settlement imposed from above by imperialism.

**Mick** The person who would opt for reform or a reformist solution where a thoroughgoing revolution could be triggered by or developed out of a national struggle — he or she would be a reformist. There are not the slightest grounds in the 12th year of the Northern Ireland war to think this is a possibility in Northern Ireland.

On the contrary. In any case federalism would not contradict a revolutionary development; it might help it. Even Rayner Lysaght in SO admits that.

A federal Ireland is part of our transitional programme. In the first place it can help reassure the Protestants and thus, whether marginally or seriously, help create a basis for class unity for a new Ireland which would not coerce the Protestants. In the second place, the programme and all its demands are the property of the revolutionary party, which uses and swivels the programme, putting forward now this and now that slogan or demand depending on its analysis of the situation. As Trotsky said, the significance of the programme is the significance of the party. Nothing in our reform programme excludes development and escalation all the way to socialist revolution — unless we should be so stupid as to make a fetish of federalism or autonomy.

You make a fetish of it — negatively.

**Jackie** You, Tony, plainly have the notion that we should shun reforms because reforms are an alternative to revolution. You say: it is not wrong to argue for reforms, but it is wrong to argue for a reformist solution to the Irish struggle.

Here you say the right words — nothing wrong with reforms — but then you contradict them flatly. Any proposal less than full revolution, any specific demand focused on a specific problem, can be a 'reformist solution'. The question is, how is it used, and by whom?

What do you think of the Transitional Programme? Do we fear to use single — realisable, and, taken on their own, reformist — slogans like the sliding scale of wages? Why fear to use autonomy or federalism?

If you are logical, you will object to using any specific demand from the Transitional Programme. You will insist on using the whole programme at all times. I.e. you'll be a passive propagandist. That's what the logic of your position is for Ireland — passive propagandism.

Advancing democratic solutions to the Protestant/Catholic conflict in no sense means setting a predetermined point at which a struggle will stop. Concretely the limits of the Northern Ireland struggle are set by the working-class split.

## Session 4: A hidden reformist solution? A two-nations theory?



Masked Protestant vigilantes searching a youth

You fear that a proposal for a democratic settlement will limit revolutionary possibilities because you see the war of the IRA — the 'national struggle' — as a great locomotive, a deus ex machina, outside of the class struggle and the development of the working class. As has already been pointed out, your notion of socialism coming out of the present war implies socialism imposed against a big section of the working class by a military elite.

We have a different assessment of the potential of the present Six County Catholic struggle, based on the relationship of forces, the attitudes of the Protestant workers, etc. Nothing that we propose will or could freeze the situation at its present limited possibilities.

A democratic settlement, on the contrary, might create a framework for reconciliation and thus could speed up developments beyond the limits now imposed on them by the Catholic/Protestant communal antagonism and the working-class split which is part of it.

I thought that was an ABC question — how reforms relate to the revolutionary programme and the Transitional Programme.

**Tony** You have it back to front. The national question is central to perman-

ent revolution. Read Trotsky. Revolutionary struggle against imperialism like the IRA's is a higher level of struggle than the struggle for reforms. It is a direct challenge to the imperialist state.

**Mick** The classic country of permanent revolution, and strictly speaking the only one, was Russia. The national question played a peripheral part in it — the oppressed nations were liberated by the Russian workers' revolution.

**Tony** You may well talk about nations. As I've told you before, O'Mahony is a two nations man, and his 'autonomy' really amounts to the Protestants keeping a sectarian sub-state of their own. I don't really see how it's different from Protestant self-determination.

**Mick** O'Mahony told me in great confidence, but in the circumstances I suppose I can tell you, Tony. He swears he agrees with the polemic he wrote recently in SO against the two nations theory. He doesn't call for Protestant self-determination.

**Tony** He is a liar. I can't see any distinction between a community and a nation, or between autonomy and self-determination. You need to simplify reality — not overcomplicate it. There

are only two classes.

**Patrick** And there are only two colours, black and white...

**Tony** It's quite plain. O'Mahony thinks the Protestants are a distinct grouping. Therefore he can only be saying they are a nation. I knew it as soon as I heard of the notorious 'two nations' theory.

**Jackie** Did you ever read that great classic work of Marxist theory published in the Bolshevik Party journal in 1913, 'Marxism and the National Question'?

**Tony** No, who wrote it?

**Jackie** J V Stalin.

**Tony** Now I'm beginning to understand!

**Jackie** According to Trotsky the work was written under the schoolmastership of Bukharin and 'creatively edited' by Lenin. The fact that Stalin the counter-revolutionary dictator rebuilt the walls of the old Tsarist prison-house of nations, so that the USSR is today the worst oppressor of nations in the world — that doesn't and can't undo the work of Stalin the revolutionary, including this, any more than the Stalinist counter revolution can cancel out the historical significance of the October Revolution.

'Marxism and the National Question' is on the simplest basic expositions on this issue. I've got a copy of it here on the shelf. I'll get it.

**Jackie** Ready! Speaking for the Bolshevik Party in 1913, Stalin defines a nation like this:

**"A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture"**.

The Northern Ireland Protestants have all the characteristics outlined here — bar one. They do not have a distinct territory.

There is a big Catholic minority even in Belfast, in the centre of the Protestant heartland of Antrim and Down, and a Catholic majority in two of the Six Counties and about half the whole Six County land area.

The Protestants and Catholic communities interlace and interpenetrate. The Protestant colony put down in Ireland four centuries ago could have developed into a nation, as the historically younger but similar English colonies in America did, by pushing aside the natives more or less completely or massacring them. It didn't.

Not enough settlers came in; landlords let land (usually the worst land) in disputed English/Scots areas to Catholics; the Catholics made their way from the areas surrounding the Protestant territory into the industrial areas as the 19th century developed.

There is no Protestant nation, fully developed or sorted out. There is a Protestant community with a distinct history, culture, tradition, and

psychological identity.

In the last decade or more, the Protestant community has begun to see itself as increasingly distinct from Britain too — or sections of it have.

If you like, it's a nation that might have been — a nation manque. It's even, if you like, a nation that might yet be. A Protestant nation could be crystallised out by a process of mass population movements in the course of a sectarian civil war, and as a result of a separating-out of its identity in conflict with Britain.

**Jimmy** I think you are just logic-chopping, Jackie. Many countries have big minorities. Why should the Six Counties be different? The process of the separating-off of a Protestant nation has probably gone a bit further than you think.

**Jackie** Well, that's possible. It may be that the 'nation' that the Provos will secure self-determination for is the Protestants!

**Tony** But what defines their identity is their pro-imperialism.

**Mick** Tony, you maintain your picture of the Northern Ireland Protestants only by a wilful act of ignoring the facts and the history.

You define them out of their full historic and social context by a one-dimensional political caricature — pro-imperialist. Suppose some comrades haven't your gift for wearing ideological blinkers to structure what they see, and face the fact that the Protestants are a distinct community. Suppose they agree with you on the basis of your notion of imperialism and the pro-imperialism of the Protestants. Then they would go over to the British and Irish Communist Organisation's position of defending the Northern Ireland state as an expression of democratic self-determination by the Protestants.

You are BICO's mirror-image.

**Patrick** Come to think of it, the BICO were once their own mirror image — populist Catholic-nationalist Irish Republicans, albeit Stalin-Mao flavoured.

**Tony** You are just covering for O'Mahony. Self-determination is only for the oppressed, not for oppressors or the allies of oppressors.

**Mick** Self-determination is possible only to people with a distinct territory, where they are the overwhelming majority population. We do not talk of self-determination for the Protestants because they are a community laced in with the Catholic community; and because self-determination for the Protestants lies at the other side of a bloody civil war and repartition.

If you like, autonomy, or federalism, is a compromise, an attempt to find a basis for conciliation and building working-class unity across the communal divide.

The Catholics are the big majority in Ireland. So we talk of self-determination for Ireland as a whole, and as much autonomy for the Protestants as is

compatible with that. Federalism is a concretisation of that idea.

**Jackie** These nuances and shades are pretty important, Tony! By definition it is the oppressed who have to fight for self-determination! But oppressors, and especially the local allies of imperialist oppressors — and there are many communities like that dotted around the world — can quickly find themselves the oppressed.

Our attitude derives from a basic programme — we are for what Lenin called consistent democracy. John O'Mahony's article in SO about the communal violence in Sri Lanka talks about that. Incidentally, why are you for federalism in Sri Lanka and not in Ireland?

**Tony** That's all abstract. Lenin only meant personal democratic rights. I'm for democratic rights for the Protestants, yes; and for the Jews in Palestine, after Israel has been smashed and conquered. That's the traditional Trotskyist programme. It used to be all over the pages of the SLL press in the early and mid '60s in our campaign against the Pabloite revisionists and Sinhalese chauvinists of Ceylon.

It just shows how ignorant you are if you don't know that. You must be mad if you think there is any comparison with Northern Ireland. I never learned anything about that in the SLL. And I'll be damned if, after 20 years as a Trotskyist, I'll learn about it from a reformist like O'Mahony.

**Jimmy** But don't you think, Tony, that there are at least elements of Catholic chauvinism in, for example, the Provos' present attitude to the Protestant community. Why are the Sinhalese chauvinists if the Provos are not? Even the founders of the Provos, O'Brady and David O'Connell, say as much in their own way.

**Mick** No, Tony, I'm sure you didn't hear any of this in the SLL. But Sri Lanka has everything to do with Ireland. The parallels are astonishingly comprehensive and precise, though of course I'm not saying that the two are identical, and all parallels of this sort break down at some point.

We've just seen the bloody consequences of the lack of democracy for a minority. Some of the Tamils were favoured by the British, according to their policy of resting on local minorities, and some of the Sinhalese reaction against the Tamils was rooted in this history.

**Tony** That's irrelevant. The Tamils are now an oppressed minority.

**Mick** The Irish minority problem presents itself to us now in an artificial form, created by British imperialism and the Orange Order: it is the problem of a Catholic minority in the artificial Six County state. That must be the thing that immediately concerns us — support for the Catholic minority and their revolt.

But our basic programme must in-

clude a solution to the basic structural Irish minority problem. This is the problem of a Protestant, or Anglo-Scots-Irish, minority. We must offer them a democratic framework.

The Northern Ireland Protestants would be an oppressed minority now in a united Ireland that bore any relation to the 26 Counties.

**Jackie** And to say that socialism is the answer is true but irrelevant. Socialism will not immediately dissolve national identities. We will need a democratic programme for situations like Northern

Ireland, or Sri Lanka, or Palestine, even after the socialist revolution.

Read Lenin on the question. Some of his most bitter scorn and anger is directed against those who denied the need for such a programme after the socialist revolution. Read his polemics against Bukharin and Pyatakov in 1916.

**Anne-Marie** You've just got the wrong priorities. The Catholics suffer terrible sectarianism from the Protestants, and here you are, worrying about possible sectarianism against the Protestants in the future by the heroic leaders of the oppressed Catholics, the Provisionals.

And you can't identify the Provos with the 26 County state. The Provos make it quite clear that they are a socialist, secular movement.

They are genuine radicals, not fake lefts.

**Jackie** You say the Provisionals are more genuinely radical than their predecessors? No they are not, actually. Even those who talk socialism in the North have not broken with Church teaching. In the South they are middle class, often openly right wing.

**Jackie** Wait a minute. Let me answer the door. One other person is expected for this last session.

(Jackie goes to the door and returns followed by a tall bearded man in a long overcoat looking rather like Holbein's well-known portrait of Henry VIII. Jackie introduces all those seated, and then says:)

This is Donal Rayner. He's from Dublin. He's in People's Democracy. We're in touch from time to time. I mentioned this discussion to him and he said he'd like to come. He has contributed a couple of pieces to the discussion in SO, as you may recall. He knows a lot about modern Ireland, having written a book on the 26 County state after 1922. He agrees with you, Tony, I'm sorry to say.

**Donal** Sorry I couldn't get here earlier! How is the discussion going to proceed?

**Jackie** We've already had four sessions. It makes most sense if we have a look at your views — the stuff you put in SO. We all read your articles with great interest.

**Donal** You mean my open letter to John O'Mahony and the follow-up piece I did? That man always gets everything wrong! I've been telling him for 15 years that he doesn't understand the national question and the permanent revolution in Ireland.

**Mick** Oh, you know John, do you, Donal? I didn't realise you did.

**Donal** Yes, Sean and I go back a long way — '67 or '68, I think. We used to be in the same organisation, the old Irish Workers' Group. In one of my SO pieces, I mention a conversation I had with him six or seven years ago, where he confirmed over a few pints that he is convinced that Northern Ireland's Protestants were originally colons.

**Jackie** Yes: three and four hundred years ago!

**Donal** He gave his entire position away by admitting that, don't you think?

**Mick** Something puzzles me, Donal.



## Session 5: A discussion with Donal R

You denounce O'Mahony in SO as British. But he isn't, and if you know him you couldn't possibly think he is.

**Donal** It depends what you mean by Irish. O'Mahony doesn't agree with us politically. He is not for Ireland.

**Jackie** Your idea of Ireland!

**Donal** It's nonsense for him to claim to be Irish. There's a consensus on that: the IRSP made the same point in their polemic with O'Mahony.

**Jackie** I remember. But that was just yahoo stuff, Donal! You should know better, or at least feel inhibited about it.

**Patrick** It's all yahoo stuff!

**Jimmy** Is this worth pursuing? I can't see the point.

**Mick** I don't know if it is worth pursuing, but I have a sneaking feeling that it has a bearing on the whole Protestant-Catholic business. After all, what is an Irish person? You rule the Protestant community out of your idea of Irishness by defining them as pro-imperialist. And in the same way you reclassify John O'Mahony, someone you know to be Irish, as British because he doesn't agree with your version of Irish nationalism. On one level, of course, this is all laughable nonsense.



But it has a terrible logic. Nationality becomes the same thing as political allegiance, and you transpose the attitudes proper to struggle against political trends into a struggle of community against community. That is chauvinism.

**Tony** If the Protestants stopped being Unionists, then they'd just be Irish, no problem. We have to break them from their pro-imperialist consciousness.

**Jackie** All those 'ifs', Tony! As the old saying goes, 'if was never in a true story'. We have to begin from where we are, and that includes the overweening fact that the Protestants have a conception of their own identity different from the identity of the rest of the Irish. Objectively there is no doubt that they are a distinct community — in origin, history, culture, religion, and, for most of the time since the Ulster colony arrived, language (the majority on the island spoke Gaelic).

**Tony** There is no doubt that politics is decisive here — otherwise you wind up like O'Mahony arguing that Poland has national rights even if that leads to anti-socialist counter-revolution. Donal is quite right, O'Mahony can't be Irish, wherever he was born, however he talks or looks, and even if he calls himself Irish.

**Mick** Not even if he has an Irish passport?

**Jackie** Don't be stupid, Mick! Who cares about passports? We can't be formalists about these things. Look at Donal Rayner: he's probably got a British passport. Or he used to have, anyway, because he's Welsh!

**Donal** No I'm not, I'm Irish.

**Jackie** You are if you want to be, Donal. And plainly you do want to be. I remember the biographical details you put at the back of your book on the 26 Counties — descent from Fergus O'Connor the Chartist, and from Arthur O'Connor the United Irishman and Napoleonic general, wasn't it?

**Donal** Yes, so I'm Irish — even if I was born and grew up in Wales.

**Jackie** Not only Irish, Donal. With that genealogy you are surely a descendant of the last crowned High King of Ireland, Rory O'Connor.

**Donal** So I believe.

**Jackie** Ours is no narrow workerist discussion group! All Irish classes are represented here, including some that died out long ago.

**Patrick** But it isn't a joke. You really think you have the right to give out national identity tags and take them away as if they were nicknames! The spectacle of the Irish nationalist Welshman reclassifying the socialist Irishman as British may be the stuff of farce. But there's no way that approach isn't go-

ing to lead to the most vicious and intolerant chauvinism: because of course the political virtues for which you award the Irish national identity-tag — anti-imperialism, Republican separatism, ingrained hostility to Britain — are to be found in one community only, and are detested by the other. Nationality is not for you an objective fact, but a political definition you can award or remove according to your whim. You use it as a political hatchet.

**Anne-Marie** What are you people? Sociologists? Of course we use political definitions. If the Protestants don't accept Irish nationalism, and prefer a link with Britain, then they're British — and they should go and live in Britain! In any case O'Mahony isn't Irish — look at the way he writes about Ireland. Peter Flack nailed him on that in SO. Calling the leaders of Ireland "backward, Catholic, bourgeois, partitionist bigots", indeed! He has a "vitriolic hatred" for the real Irish.

**Jackie** Yes, disgusting stuff, Anne-Marie. I suspect he is what we used to call here a 'godless communist'. I'll bet he even thinks romantic Ireland is dead and gone and with O'Leary in the grave.

**Donal** I think you have to accept that the Protestants are for now, at this stage of the revolution, outside the national cause and pitted against it. They will be drawn in as that cause develops and becomes a socialist movement according to the logic of the permanent revolution. There is no other solution — the movement must be spread to the South.

If it does, and if it uses working-class forms of struggle, then that can change the entire situation in the North, and the Protestants can come in from the cold.

And it has spread and used the said methods two times already — after Bloody Sunday, in February 1972, when there were strikes, and during the hunger strikes.

That's the solution.

**Mick** I'd like to see it your way, Donal, but it doesn't add up. Three objections:

Why do you think even big strikes and working-class activity in the South in support of the Northern Catholics should be able to somehow 'get through' to the Protestant workers? They would not be seen as working-class action, but as activity by the Catholic workers to help their own.

That's what they would be. Strikes for such a cause would not necessarily have implicit in them any sort of working-class politics. It depends.

And why do you think socialism would eliminate the Protestants' reluctance to be a minority? Even if the fear of Rome Rule were eliminated, it might well be that you would still have to find some federal framework. A national identity different from the Irish majority is a big part of the Protestant community. You yourself call them a national minority, don't you? The idea that socialism will eliminate all such divisions and supersede the need for a

democratic programme is childish.

Again I urge you to read Lenin's polemics against Bukharin and Pyatakov in 1916. There is a short answer to all the 'socialism-is-the-answer' merchants — whether it's your 'Provos-will-lead-the-permanent-revolution-in-Ireland' or Militant's up-in-the-air call for socialism now. It is irrelevant. Questions of national and communal relations will exist after the socialist revolution, and probably for a long time. Read Lenin!

And finally you contradict yourself utterly. If working-class methods of struggle — strikes etc. — in the South in support of the Catholic community in the North are ipso facto **working class** in the political sense, then why would not the stupendous working-class action of the Protestants in defence (as they saw it) of their community not also be working-class politics?

**Donal** Because they are not anti-imperialist! Because they oppose imperialism, if at all, only from the right! Because they had the collusion of the state forces for the May 1974 strike and could not have had it otherwise — and anyway the Protestant workers were coerced into that strike.

**Jackie** I think you grossly exaggerate the level of collusion, Donal — and the importance of the coercion at the beginning of the 1974 strike.

**Jimmy** There is always coercion! What do you think pickets are for?

**Jackie** However it began, the strike quickly became a real expression of the drive of the Protestant community against the Council of Ireland and the power-sharing executive. You have a strange belief in the omnipotence of the state against a general strike.

**Mick** Especially for someone whose international organisation spent much of the '70s throughout Europe advocating the all-purpose instant general strike for all occasions!

**Jackie** To get back to the point I was making, you can't say pro-Catholic-community strikes in the South are working-class politics without also implying that about the strike in the North. I don't think either would express working-class politics.

**Mick** You ascribe a character to strikes in the South straight out of your own political preconceptions. You try ridiculously to diminish what happened in '74 and to pretend that it wasn't a genuine act of the Protestant working class. Like Tony, you wear blinding ideological spectacles.

**Tony** Everyone has ideological spectacles.

**Donal** Yours are those of a British reformist, scared of permanent revolution and wanting to deny the relevance in Ireland of the said process and strategy!

**Mick** Yes, of course, we all structure

reality according to our preoccupations. But you take similar things, Catholic strikes for the Catholic community and Protestant strikes for the felt concerns of the Protestant community. You say that one of them — the feeble ripples of Catholic solidarity in the South — is of one kind, genuine working-class action, and the other, the powerful and victorious general strike in the North, is no sort of working-class action. I think your ideological spectacles are very thick indeed!

I'm not saying, incidentally, that you should not take the political differences into account — only don't equate the Southern strikes with working-class politics on the basis of their allegedly anti-imperialist drive and pretend that the Northern general strike has no working-class character at all because of its aims. Otherwise you miss the point. The most terrible thing about Northern Ireland's tragedy is that the Orange cause was 'reduced to the men and women of no property', and it was a working-class weapon which won the Protestant community their greatest victory.

And, Donal, I'd be cautious in flinging about labels like 'anti-imperialist' and 'pro-imperialist' here. It was the Protestants who smashed British strategy, and that strategy was heavily dependent on majority Catholic support and on the SDLP. If the Protestants were to the right of Britain, that only emphasizes that they are not to be adequately defined as Britain's tools and pawns. They have their own interests, for which they are prepared to oppose Britain. Your distinction between good and bad anti-imperialism is rather arbitrary.

**Jackie** Incidentally, if strikes in support of one side have a magic healing power for the working class, then why didn't the stupendous general strike — and that's what it was, Donal R, whatever about its objectives — up here evoke some sympathy in the South? Wrong politics? Politics and objectives that repelled the Southern workers? Of course, but it would work the other way round too. Strikes in the South in support of the Catholics in the North would, for the Protestant workers, be strikes with the wrong politics and repellent objectives.

**Mick** Donal, I think your own chosen definition of the Protestants — a national minority — rules out your 'political' distinction between pro-Catholic strikes as working-class politics and Protestant or pro-Protestant strikes as not.

If they are a national minority, then the entire body of literature of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky on the subject of distinct peoples, nations, and fragments of nations, tells us that they have certain rights. Whether you mean it or not, you are saying that the intra-Irish aspects of Northern Ireland come down to the struggle of a national minority with the majority.

**Donal** Overlaid by the artificial Six County state and snarled up by British interference.

**Mick** Yes of course. But what follows

as a result of British involvement cannot be that those who you say are a national minority have no rights. The tragedy is that the workers on both sides line up strictly according to communities, or, if you like, nationalities.

**Anne-Marie** You talk as if imperialism doesn't exist! You say that the oppressed and the oppressor are on an equal plane. National rights are only for the oppressed, not for oppressors!

**Patrick** That's one of the most common ideas on the Trotskyist left — and one of the most stupid. You support the oppressed, sure, but you can't support a proposal to replace the present situation where there are half a million oppressed Catholics in the Six Counties with one in which there will be a million oppressed Protestants in a Catholic state!

**Donal** I don't know what you people are going on about on the Provos and federalism. Don't mind what David O'Connell has said: federalism was never intended as 'the hand of

**'The most terrible thing about Northern Ireland's tragedy is that the Orange cause was 'reduced to the men and women of no property', and it was a working-class weapon which won the Protestant community their greatest victory'**

friendship' for the national minority. Federalism in the early '70s reassured the Provos' backward element that the religious sectarian features of the 26 County state would not have to go when Ireland was united.

**Mick** Suppose that's true. It's just another way of saying that Ireland is not inhabited by one homogeneous people, and that the old Provo leadership understood that. I find the idea that such an arrangement as federalism could only shield and protect backward and undesirable things pretty childish, Donal; and that's your point, isn't it. All the stranger coming from you because in your SO piece you accept that the proposal of federalism may have a useful role to play in conciliating the Protestants at some time in the future.

**Donal** But not now!

**Jackie** That's one of the most revealing things about your position, Donal R, but I'll come back to that. Go on, Mick.

**Mick** In any case, none of us support the Provo version of federalism: we say it contained the core idea that could be developed.

**Patrick** Donal, you give a picture of the Southern Provos' reasons for wanting federalism. But what about the Northern Provos' reasons for wanting rid of it? The reasons are to do with the peculiar situation of the Northern Catholics, with the fact that they are something like a new, distinct Irish minority. The Northerners oppose federalism because they would be a minority within any remotely likely Northern sub-state. (The Provos' nine-county Ulster is a romantic fantasy).

**Tony** And why shouldn't they? Why should they consent to be a minority in their own country? And accept Protestant oppression and privilege? That's what's at issue.

**Patrick** We Catholics in Northern Ireland should not accept any discrimination or inequality — not one jot of it. And we won't! But there is no getting away from the fact that we are the minority. Even if you lop off the Catholic areas along the Border — and you surely would in any rational federation...

**Mick** Don't be too sure. De Valera was willing to accept a federation of Six Counties and 26 — and I suppose such an arrangement in the future is not inconceivable.

**Patrick** Maybe. The point is that some of the Northern Catholics would always be the minority in any Northern Ireland entity. That is what is at the root of the Northern Provos' revolt against the old Provo policy.

**Anne-Marie** You're saying here that the Six County Catholics are driving to get into a position to oppress the Protestants! What someone in the SO discussion called 'Catholic irredentism'.

**Patrick** No I'm not. Whatever you think of the Provo politics grafted onto it, the Catholic revolt is a just revolt against oppression. But that doesn't tell us the best objectives for that revolt to aim at.

In my view it should aim at achieving a democratic settlement and a framework for Protestant-Catholic coexistence on this island. No such framework is possible that doesn't take account of the separate Protestant identity. The problem for the Six County Catholic minority is that if they accept that, then they are accepting that they'll always be a minority — not necessarily an oppressed minority, or anything other than a fully equal minority, but still a minority.

You can see why we don't feel at all easy with the idea of any Protestant-majority sub-state. Yet without that no resolution is possible.

**Jackie** Not quite, Pat. Another resolution is possible — by way of sectarian civil war, the massacring and driving out of populations, and the terrorisation

of those not driven out. To me that is a very strong recommendation for seeking an agreed solution.

**Patrick** The tragedy is that the long and unequal struggle of the Provos has pushed them into a variant of Irish nationalism that is now organically confined to one community and expresses the narrow sectional interests (or what they think are the interests) of one community. It expresses those interests in such a way as to exclude the broader all-Ireland conciliating Republican framework. The demand for a unitary Irish state is completely unrealisable. The attempt by the Northern Ireland minority to realise it can only — at a certain stage, if Britain were to pull out without a widely accepted settlement — lead to sectarian civil war and repartition.

Say what you like about it, Donal, the old Provo leadership are better Republicans than the Northerners.

**Donal** Even if the said Northerners are socialists?

**Patrick** Not socialists — populists!

**Anne-Marie** You support the right wing against the left, the petty bourgeois against the socialists!

**Patrick** And you support the communal populists — because of a little garnish of socialist phrases arranged around a core of increasingly sectarian politics!

No, I don't deny that some people in the Provos have sincere socialist intentions. But in any case we don't need the Provos to be socialists; or, anyway, it would be unfair and inappropriate to condemn and dismiss them, as a nationalist movement, for not being working-class socialists. As a nationalist movement, they must be judged by how they relate to the central question which gave them their origin and with which they concern themselves — the national question and the intra-Irish conflict.

Here they are narrow, divisive Catholic chauvinists. They leave themselves no other policy than the suicidal attempt to conquer the Protestants. They disguise this political logic with utterly futile demands that Britain should 'disarm' the Protestants before it leaves'; that is, they evade facing up to the impossibility of the Six County Catholics coercing the Protestants by fantasising that Britain will do it for them!

You say they are a radical new departure, Donal? On this issue they have the politics of John Redmond and the pre-1914 Home Rule Party. Redmond, too, looked to Britain to deal with the Protestants.

**Robert** Yes, but they were always like that, whatever they talked about. Blowing the guts out of our towns and cities in the early '70s — that was no 'hand of friendship' from David O'Connell and his car bombers.

**Tony** They were fighting imperialism.

**Mick** They were trying to smash the old sectarian state. You might not have chosen their methods, or advocated them, but you had to support their revolt.

**Jackie** Here, though, Mick, the attitude you take differs a bit whether you live in Britain or Ireland. In Britain it may be enough to say that it's the revolt of an oppressed section against your own state, and you have to support it, whatever you think about its advisability, methods, and objectives. For me, I'm sure it wasn't enough, and those who confined themselves to doing that, keeping reservations and criticism at best for the small print, like your friend O'Mahony for example, have a lot to answer for.

But at least you can see their point of view. Here in Ireland you had to oppose the Provo campaign as something growing out of traditional physical-force-on-principle Republicanism. It wasn't just murderous — and Robert is essentially right on that — it was always hopeless and always counter-productive.

If the unity of the Irish people, and

### **'The Provo campaign has been the locomotive of change... The constitutional nationalists reap the harvest sown by the 'men of violence', the 'mountainy men'... But the chapter isn't ended yet'.**

especially of the working class, is the prerequisite for progress, then you don't 'fight the Brits' in such a way as to push the possibility of that unity back for decades and to fill the chasm dividing Catholics and Protestants with a river of blood.

**Tony** You see how far you've gone, Jackie? You condemn the war of national liberation against British imperialism.

**Jackie** It's not a matter of condemnation, Tony, but of understanding. The majority here want the British link. Of course there is also the ages-old question of Irish independence and the the question of the Six County Catholic minority. But, despite that, to define the situation as one of 'British-occupied Ireland' is crass stupidity.

It's not politically true, and it implies physically conquering the Protestant community. That's what the Provo campaign implies. Do you know, Tony, that lots of people in Northern Ireland whose ancestors have been here for hundreds of years think it means them when they hear talk of 'Brits out'?

**Mick** Yet the Provos brought down Stormont, and it would not have happened without them. The Provo campaign has been the locomotive of change. It has been the spur that set the politicians seeking changes and solutions. Before that there was 50 years of stagnation and Catholic oppression.

It may be — I think for sure it is — true that no clear sweeping victory is possible for the Catholics, and that the Provisionals' campaign has pushed back the remotest possibility of Northern Ireland working-class unity for decades. Nevertheless, working-class unity didn't exist before that campaign.

**Jimmy** On a trade-union level it did.

**Mick** Trade unions agreeing not to discuss the fact that Catholics were second-class citizens and suffered job discrimination! The point I'm making is that the Provos' campaign was maybe the only way out of the impasse. That's how it's always been in Irish history — the Irish against the overwhelming might and power of Britain, and the revolutionaries in the background forcing the rulers to make reforms from above. The constitutional nationalists — now, the SDLP — reap the harvest sown by the 'men of violence', the 'mountainy men'.

**Jackie** Yes, but the chapter isn't ended yet, Mick. The Protestant community has been set in motion over the last dozen years, and had an extreme sharpness of identity carved out for it. That process probably isn't finished yet — and so history hasn't yet said its last word on the Provo campaign.

I'm not entirely sure of it, but a case could be made that the Provo campaign cut right across a line of development which might have seen some form of a united Ireland, as part of Britain and Ireland moving into the EEC.

Earlier someone described the Provos as SDLPers or Fianna Failers with guns. It's also true that the Provos have been pursuing British policy — with methods which have mainly had the effect of mobilising Protestants against any resolution of the problem that the Catholics would find acceptable.

**Tony** British policy!

**Jackie** Yes, Britain was moving towards trying to shed responsibility for Northern Ireland in the '60s — gingerly, slowly, empirically. The civil rights movement and the Protestant backlash, and then the Provos, cut right across that, and you could argue that the result after 12 years is that they have erected new barriers against any such reunification from above. Certainly the chasm dividing Protestants and Catholics — and that's the root problem — has been gouged deeper.

**Donal** Emotional crap! Where's the evidence that Britain would do anything like that? It was international companies that put pressure for changes to the sectarian Northern Ireland state.

**Jackie** Evidence? Anglo-Irish free trade agreement, O'Neill-Lemass

meeting. The stuff about international companies is just a ploy to feed your picture of Britain as the eternal villain. What about the British declaration about agreeing to a united Ireland if the Northern Ireland majority would?

**Tony** But Britain maintains the present state.

**Jackie** Yes, that's the point, and that's the great crime — maintaining the status quo, instead of radically changing it. However, things might have been changed piecemeal that can't be changed now.

It may be that the Protestant backlash that started to gather strength in the mid '60s would have prevented change anyway. The point is that the Provos' campaign built up that backlash into one of enormous proportions.

So while it is true that the Provos have spurred on the politicians, and got rid of Stormont, you also have to measure the price of that in deepening the division in the Irish people, in making the root problem more intractable.

**Anne-Marie** So they should have relied on the government?

**Mick** No, but they should have refrained from doing anything that avoidably made the root problem worse.

**Patrick** That was the fatal effect of the delusion expressed in such of our ideas as the description of the Six Counties as 'British-occupied Ireland'.

**Donal** This is just idle speculation! Meanwhile the revolution is alive, well and walking about in Ireland! And you are against it, Mick, with O'Mahony's nonsense in SO.

We should get back to federalism. I think SO uses federalism to deny permanent revolution. SO seeks reformist solutions and counterposes them to a thoroughgoing radical and revolutionary solution. You want to stop the process of permanent revolution.

So did the Provo right wing. For them federalism was an insurance against the revolution spilling over from the North to the South. However, the said process asserts itself. Federalism has been ended by the Sinn Fein left.

It's either federalism or permanent revolution right now: you must choose your perspective.

**Tony** Exactly!

**Donal** Once the permanent revolution has fully taken hold, and there is a 32 County mobilisation, then sections, and eventually the bulk, of the Protestant workforce will join it. Perhaps then, the idea of a federal Ireland will be revived as a tactical move to ease the Protestants into Irish unity. However, we can't know: it remains a matter of conjecture.

**Mick** So you do think that federalism may be useful?

**Donal** At a later stage, perhaps.

**Mick** Why then and not now? You

should think about that, Donal R. You accept that federalism may help conciliate the Protestants. But it can't be used yet! They can't be conciliated yet?

I leave aside your fine distinction in your SO article between tactics and principles, except to say that consistent democracy in such matters as national minority (your definition) rights is not just a matter of 'tactics' for Marxists.

But given that you think federalism may be useful at some stage, then why not use it from the very beginning? Why do you exult in the dropping of the 'said demand' by the Provos?

**Donal** Because they have moved a bit towards the permanent revolution, and see Ireland as a whole as needing to be revolutionised.

**Mick** But this doesn't make sense. You think that after most of working-class Ireland is 'mobilised' (whatever

**'You talk about the working class, but all your hopes are centred on the military elitists in the Provisional IRA. That is why you cannot see any use for a democratic programme now'.**

that means) and the majority of Protestant workers have begun to join 'the mobilisation', then it may make sense to propose federalism as a means of conciliating the Northern Protestant community. But you can't offer it before because that somehow wouldn't be 'revolutionary'!

Or is it that you calculate that the Provo leaders are going in the right direction and that their move from the old federalism is part of that process, and so you accept their position for the moment, while you reserve the right to think that federalism may be some use later.

**Donal** I've already said what I think about the old federalism of the right wing. I say only that the said proposal is a tactic, not any sort of principle. The general trajectory of the Provo left is the decisive thing.

**Mick** The entire political history of the international tendency you belong to consists of weaving political events into super-optimistic scenarios, and relating not to the world as it is, but to the prospects read back from that scenario. Your stuff on federalism and the Provos doesn't make sense to me.

**Jackie** It does make sense, Mick. Donal R and his comrades believe that

Fidel Castro Adams will lead the Irish socialist revolution. The revolution will be triggered by the war the Provos are waging in the North. That being their scenario, everything else follows.

As I say, I'd prefer a more general formula than 'federalism' — 'as much autonomy as is compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people'. But I'm at one with Mick in seeking a democratic solution to the intra-Irish conflict.

**Tony** But what you're doing is giving reformist advice to the government, or to the Labour leaders!

**Donal** What else is it? It certainly isn't permanent revolution.

**Mick** You could say that about every democratic or transitional demand we make — about everything we call for short of the socialist revolution!

And after all the ruling class sometimes listens to our demands and grants them — so you could say they heed our 'advice', especially when we can link it up with threats!

What separates revolutionary socialists from reformists when they advocate the same limited demands? We rely on the masses, we try to organise the working class to fight for the demands. We link our demands with other, more advanced, demands, and try to lead the workers' movement forward, as far as possible, beyond the initial limited demand.

Read the Transitional Programme.

**Tony** There's nothing in the Transitional Programme about autonomy for the Protestants.

**Donal** We have no use for such a demand now. Later, maybe.

**Jackie** The reason you don't have a use for it, Donal, is that you in PD see yourselves as the fifth wheel of the Provo chariot to which you are trying to hitch yourselves. You see no independent role for an Irish Trotskyist group. At best you see it as no more than a propaganda auxiliary of the Republicans. And in fact that's what PD has been, since 1971.

You talk about the working class, but all your hopes are centred on the military elitists in the Provisional IRA. That is why you cannot see any use for a democratic programme now.

**Donal** You mean that we're not sectarians like you, standing aside from the actual struggle.

**Jackie** The immediate use for us of a democratic programme is to allow workers from both communities to relate to each other and to reassure each other honestly that neither side wants to impose or continue any form of national, communal, or sectarian oppression of the other.

**Donal** That'll bring the workers together, just like that?

**Jackie** No it won't, just like that. But no

other basis of working-class unity is possible — not even the unity of a few hundred from both communities. You can't ignore the 'constitutional question' that is tearing Northern Ireland apart and may yet tear all Ireland apart.

**Donal** We don't ignore it! We have a fully adequate solution — a united Ireland which in the course of the unfolding of the permanent revolution will also be a socialist Ireland.

**Patrick** You have a programme of forcibly incorporating the Protestants into a Catholic-dominated Ireland. The rest of your hopes and 'perspectives' are just fantasy and window-dressing, though I'm sure you sincerely believe in them.

**Robert** You say you can't unite workers without a proposal for constitutional readjustment. What about Militant? They have got a bit of support here.

**Jackie** Militant makes abstract propaganda for socialism now instead of dealing with the immediate political issues. It belongs to the same order of sectarian socialism as the Socialist Party of Great Britain, or the old sterile maximalists of the Second International. Militant is a hopeless sect without any prospect of affecting developments.

Read Lenin on this sort of question in 'What Is To Be Done'. Constitutional questions are, and for a century have been, at the centre of Irish political life. Socialists cannot fail to have an answer for these questions.

Even if socialism would eliminate such questions, and supersede the now all-absorbing concerns, you would still have to live in the here and now and answer the questions as posed, from a working class point of view.

In fact, socialism does not automatically answer questions of what constitutional arrangements to have between national minorities and the majority, or between long-antagonistic communities. Again I urge you to read Lenin's 1916 polemic against Pyatakov and Bukharin.

The net result of preaching socialism in the sweet by-and-by is to leave the living immediate political questions to be posed for solutions in other than working-class terms, by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces.

**Donal** You have a stages theory! You don't know how to get from where we are now to socialism. You lack the road map of permanent revolution, and without the said strategic guidelines you are politically lost.

Your anti-imperialism will increasingly come into conflict with your theories and the said contradictions will set up a process akin to overtight shoes and growing feet! You will forsake the strait and narrow path of commitment to anti-imperialism and to the process and strategy of permanent revolution, and sink into the swamp of social-imperialism.

**Robert** I don't find what you say about preaching socialism very convincing, Jackie. Of course we preach socialism.

**Tony** Of course we do!

**Jackie** Of course we do! But socialism isn't going to come by preaching. Various types of socialism have been preached for hundreds and hundreds of years. Marxist socialism is rooted in the class struggle. It can come about in no other way than by the working class taking power.

Our job is to help the workers develop politically. That means we have to answer all the political questions. If we don't answer questions objectively posed to the workers,

then the workers will seek other answers elsewhere. In Northern Ireland the workers will, according to the traditions of their own Catholic and Protestant communities, arrive at murderously antagonistic answers.

It's no use saying socialism is the answer. Of course it is, in general, but the workers need immediate, interim or supplementary answers. They need to know what a working-class socialist government would do about specific problems.

We must give answers that help the workers move towards socialism, and help the progressive part of the working class in both communities to avoid having the working class divide murderously along the lines of the communal antagonism.

**Donal** But they are divided! One side is the right of imperialism, the other is the anti-imperialist vanguard!

**Jackie** Yes, Donal, perhaps they are. The question is, what can we do about it?

You say nothing can be done about it until the Provos win — which is the same thing as saying that nothing can ever be done about it, or at any rate not this side of sectarian civil war and repartition.

We must have our own socialist and working-class answers to all the living political questions. Such answers will generate no miracles, and will not eradicate the events of the last decade and a half. But they are a basis to begin to build some workers' unity.

If workers are not given our socialist answers, then they will continue to choose, as now, between the answers of the communal politicians. One of those answers is, if you like, anti-imperialist; and a case could be made that both communities are anti-imperialist in their different ways. The point is that neither of them can unite the working class.

**Mick** That's why we need to advocate a democratic solution, a democratic framework for the coexistence without oppression or fear of oppression of Ireland's divided people. It's an essential part of our programme for Ireland — part of our transitional programme for Ireland, if you like.

**'Militant makes abstract propaganda for socialism now instead of dealing with the immediate political issues. It belongs to the same order of sectarian socialism as the Socialist Party of Great Britain, or the old sterile maximalists of the Second International. Militant is a hopeless sect without any prospect of affecting developments'**

**Jackie** Northern Ireland's own recent history provides the proof, Robert, that the abstract preaching of an abstract socialism is no use — except maybe for building a sect.

It's often forgotten now, especially on the left, but when Northern Ireland 'blew' in 1968-9 leftists were dominant on the Catholic side — or they seemed to be, anyway. Most of the civil rights leaders were socialists of one sort or another. So were the Republicans, the group that evolved into what is now named the 'Workers Party'.

One of the central problems was that most of the socialists tried to avoid the national question, the Border and so on. Many of them said that there could be no question of a united Ireland except as part of a socialist solution. They had no answers to the immediate questions.

The Provos soon gave the traditional Republican answer, and found the most militant Catholics agreeing with them and joining them.

The Protestant workers listened to the answer of the various Protestant ultras — and in the first place to Ian Paisley, who had a nice line in pseudo-radical political patter directed against the old Unionist establishment.

This should not have surprised anyone who read what Lenin wrote against the 'Economists' in 1902.

**Donal** Yes, but all this is shadow-play and nonsense. You can't unite the Protestant and Catholic workers at this stage. And if you could it would be wrong to create the said unity.

You are looking for a short cut. This false short-cut has been pursued by, among others:

Paddy Devlin  
Conor Cruise O'Brien  
The Workers' Party  
The British and Irish Communist Organisation  
Militant Irish Monthly.

All the above have tried to unite an anti-imperialist section of the working class with a section that opposes imperialism, if at all, from the right. They have all rejected permanent revolution.

**Mick** Jim Denham in SO was rather rude about this sort of stuff. You're saying that the people you list have got their right-wing politics from paying too much attention to the Protestant working class? Because they didn't get inoculated in time with 'permanent revolution', which would have convinced them that the majority of the Six Counties working class don't have to be bothered with at this stage?

What is permanent revolution? A hallucinogenic drug like LSD? Maybe that's it, Donal — yours are psychedelic politics. You're too 'high' to bother with the real world.

**Donal** Perhaps it's better to be psychedelic and see moving pictures than to be frozen in a paralysing ice-pack of doubt, scepticism, and defeatism.

**Mick** I'm not sure about this anti-imperialism business. What does it mean?

**Anne-Marie** It's not that you are not sure about it, comrade Mick. You are pro-imperialist! You can't recognise imperialism when you see it down the road there, armed to the teeth and with its guns pointed at the anti-imperialist Catholics.

**Mick** The point is that there are many anti-imperialisms. 'Anti-imperialism' is a negative slogan, with many different possible positive contents — just like many of those in Britain who shout 'Troops Out' in chorus have radically different ideas about what will replace the existing British state power in Northern Ireland.

Your anti-imperialism, Donal, is nameless and classless.

**Donal** No, it's not. It's working class. That's what permanent revolution means — the anti-imperialist struggle can be made to develop into a socialist revolution. We counterpose permanent revolution to all the other anti-imperialisms, though we form anti-imperialist united fronts when the said strategy and tactic is the right one.

**Patrick** The problem in Northern Ireland is that *given the facts* all this talk about permanent revolution is utterly fantastic. A socialist revolution is impossible without the Protestant workers; and much of the 'anti-imperialist' struggle which is supposed to 'develop' into a socialist revolution is directed *against* the Protestant workers.

**Mick** It's a central part of the ideology — in Karl Marx's sense of 'false consciousness' — of nationalist populism in Ireland that you conflate or collapse into each other the distinct questions of imperialism and anti-imperialism on the one side, and the intra-Irish conflict on the other. Most leftists in Britain, for example, talk and try to act as if only the question of British imperialism exists in the Northern Ireland situation.

The fact is that the intra-Irish conflict is massively the bigger question, and one could argue that imperialism exists, if at all, as a legacy, a fossil without autonomous life of a once-real imperialism. The idea that the British-Protestant connection, the adhesion of the Northern Ireland Protestants to the British nation, is 'British imperialism in Ireland', is stupid. Yet that is the idea and the rationalisation out of which so many of you spin an attitude of inflexible hostility to the Protestants.

**Donal** No. Imperialism is central because permanent revolution is central. Without imperialism the permanent revolution strategy and process would not apply. The armed struggle would not make sense, and the armed struggle is the dynamo, as I think I said in SO.

But of course permanent revolution applies! The intra-Irish conflict is secondary. After permanent revolution has done most of its work, then the intra-Irish conflict will come up on the agenda and can be solved, possibly by federalism — if that's the right tactic for the leaders of the Irish national majority.

**Jackie** You'll support them whatever tactic they choose?

**Donal** Yes, of course I will. I've supported them on everything they've decided so far, haven't I? I'm no reformist — I'm a revolutionary anti-imperialist and I support the said strategy and process.

**Mick** I suggest that we separate out the two questions here: imperialism and anti-imperialism on one side, and permanent revolution on the other.

**Donal** It's the same question.

**Mick** Perhaps, but then let's agree to look at its component parts separately. If you like, we can put the pieces back together as a whole to create a dynamic model. Or rather you can — if you can.

**Jimmy** Of course he can!

**Mick** Let's go back to one of the great reference points in the history of Marxism — the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920.

There they adopted a set of theses on the national question drafted by Lenin and amended by the Congress to take account of the experience of some delegates on the Mexican revolution and of India's struggle for independence. This is one of the most profound and important documents of revolutionary Marxism.

At that time the world was dominated by colonial-imperialist blocks. Domination by way of economic strength alone was exceptional. A communist programme against imperialism had two aspects to it: against colonialism, the struggle for democracy, national independence; against the world economy of imperialism, the socialist revolution, for which the advanced countries were fully ripe.

The idea that the colonies could get their independence under capitalism — still less develop as some of them have done, phenomenally, in the last few decades, was seen as very unlikely. But now we live in a different world. The colonies have become independent.

**Tony** Nonsense. The ex-colonies aren't free, and they aren't really independent. You read too much imperialist propaganda, comrade Mick! They aren't economically independent, and therefore they aren't really independent. They'll only be independent when they get socialism. That's what the permanent revolution means.

**Mick** No! The idea that the working-class programme against imperialism included 'economic independence' for the unfree peoples was rejected as both impossible and economically retrograde and reactionary.

Faced with the liberation of the colonies from the capitalist-imperialist powers, Trotskyists have tended to dogmatise in a half-conscious desire to deny what has actually happened. They have switched the criteria of communist politics on these matters, substituting notions of economic independence for political independence, with the motive of downgrading the political independence actually achieved. Rather than the working-class seizure and reorganisation of the world economy, they have called for *national economic liberation*.

There is no such economic liberation by way of national or anti-colonial struggle. Its only real expression is petty-bourgeois and bourgeois demands for economic autarky.

So Tony's redefinition of independence as 'economic' independence aligns him, and other dogmatists with the nationalists and populists in many Third World states, whose programme remains nationalist and either implicitly or explicitly autarkic. Socialism comes to be advocated not as an internationalist programme, but as the *means* to the end of *development 'in one country'*.

Instead of the gaining of political independence leading to the development of proletarian *class* politics in the ex-colonies, as it would if there were healthy socialist parties there, the old political goals of national liberation remain central, only with an incoherently shifted content, and now with no hope of realisation.

The main function of these nationalist politics is to prevent or slow down the emergence of independent proletarian politics. For it is no part of our goal to fight for economic independence.

**Tony** That implies that the less developed countries cannot achieve economic freedom until the workers in the metropolitan countries make the socialist revolution. That's Menshevism on a world scale!

**Mick** Perhaps. But the Bolsheviks never contradicted the Mensheviks when they said that Russia was not ripe for socialism.

They wholeheartedly agreed. No Bolshevik openly disputed this until Stalin came out with 'Socialist in One Country' late in 1924, after Lenin was safely dead.

The Bolsheviks said not that Russia was ripe for socialism, but that it was ripe for a working-class seizure of power, and that its backwardness, which made socialism impossible, could be overcome only by the extension of the revolution internationally to encompass more advanced countries.

The idea of breaking from the world economy was rejected by the Bolsheviks. The idea of economic independence was regarded as a reactionary idea because the prerequisite for socialism was the most advanced stage of economic development reached by capitalism *on a world scale*. That, Tony, was the basis of Bolshevik internationalism — the international character of the economic prerequisites for socialism.

Read Trotsky's criticism of 'Socialism in One Country' — note how Trotsky time and again described the Stalinist drive for economic independence — autarky — as reactionary. That reactionary feature has been replicated by other Stalinists since, including, most notably, the Chinese.

**Jackie** And, as a matter of fact, Tony, the Stalinists described the Trotskyists as 'Mensheviks on an international scale'. They too based themselves on 'texts' and rosey analogies.

**Tony** How else than by cutting themselves off can the underdeveloped countries escape from the tentacles of imperialism? You don't want them to escape!

**Mick** The point is that objectively the chances of them escaping are very limited. Much that has happened in the Third World since the Second World War has been shaped by the fact that the workers' revolution in the advanced countries has not yet come out. In any case, read the document of the Communist International if you dispute my account of what they said.

**Donal** Yes, but what's the point? We've learned since then from General Giap and from Ernest Mandel, and from...

**Mick** The point, Donal, is that most of what passes on the left for a positive alternative to imperialism has little to do with the Communist International's programme. Frequently it is the opposite of that programme! You get reactionary nonsense. In fact you get the collapse of socialism into nationalist populism.

**Jackie** You can see how it happens by observing Tony. The agency that transforms Tony into a nationalist-populist is... dogmatism. Lenin and Trotsky never expected the colonies to be liberated before the socialist revolution. They have been liberated, politically, in varying ways and with varying degrees of real political independence.

So what about the 'theories', the dogmas? One of two things can be done. Go back to the root ideas of Marxism that were used by Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky to analyse the world around them, and how it had changed since Marx — go back to those ideas and make your own analysis of the world. Or — pit the old theories and dogmas against the facts.

That's what the dogmatists do. They can handle the facts either by denying them or by redefining them. One of the biggest Trotskyist currents, the Lambert group, denies the facts, arguing for example that the 'forces of production' have not expanded since the day the Fourth International was founded in September 1938.

They say that the expansion has been not of forces of production, but of forces of *destruction*, nuclear bombs and so on. There is enough truth in that to hold you up for three seconds until you sort it out, but it's held them up — propped them up — for three decades!

The second way of dealing with the facts is to redefine them. That is what Tony does. He redefines independence to mean economic independence, not political independence. The purpose is to be able to go on denying the progress that has been made, and to hold on to the old theories fossilised as dogma.

The cost is enormous. Wearing dogmatised 'Marxist' ideas like scales over his eyes, Tony blunders into the politics of petty-bourgeois nationalist populists. There is a merging of programmes.

**Donal** To judge by yourselves, the alternative is to collapse the dynamic revolutionary socialism of Trotsky and Lenin, which not only fights the class struggle but also takes responsibility for national liberation work and even organises the said national liberation struggle, and replace it with hopeless sectarian workerism. Worse than that, to replace it with the arrogant politics of the socialists of the metropolitan countries. Socialists in the metropolitan countries don't have that right.

**'The point is that international socialism bases itself on a world programme, and world perspectives. That means, on the world economy: socialism is not possible in a single country'.**

**Mick** That's just a trick argument, like the similar one used by those in Britain who say we have no right except the right to agree with Sinn Fein. They justify it on the principle of 'solidarity with the Irish' — but they arrive at their alignment with Sinn Fein by means of selecting among the Irish and rejecting the Irish nationalists with whom they do not agree, like the SDLP and the Workers' Party.

**Jackie** They work the trick on themselves. The same is true about the moralistic pseudo-political 'anti-imperialism'.

**Anne-Marie** I don't understand what's petty bourgeois about struggling for economic independence, Jackie.

**Jackie** Well, look at the Irish experience we discussed earlier — economic nationalism in 1932-58. The point is that international socialism bases itself on a world programme, and world perspectives. That means, on the world economy: socialism is not possible in a single country.

Now this is a basic question for Marxists — what is our attitude to what capitalism has created already. For example, what is our attitude to monopolies? Well, the petty bourgeois answer is to try to roll the film of history backwards. Are there oppressive monopolies? Then abolish them, outlaw them — go back to the capitalism of a pre-monopoly period.

In contrast, the Marxists have argued for seizing the monopolies, and the economy, and the state (or, rather, smashing the state

and replacing it with our own), and developing beyond the highest point of capitalism.

Now do you see the point? Economic nationalism means trying to go backwards — instead of going forwards on the basis of the world economy created by capitalism.

**Donal** Well, many, many countries, workers' states and others, have pursued economic nationalist policies. You condemn them for trying to develop, for not letting themselves be exploited! Do you condemn Egypt for nationalising the Suez Canal? The great majority of Third World states have nationalised their basic natural resources. Do you condemn them? These measures may not be 'economic independence', but they do give economic substance to the forms of political independence.

**Jackie** No, I don't condemn them! It is perfectly understandable in the world in which they exist that they should do that. And if it's brought some benefits, allowed industrialisation — good.

But at what a cost! The point is that the communist programme was so much better than what has happened in so many countries after independence. Locked into their own particularisms, with their own often barbarous political systems — military dictatorships, party-states of various descriptions, verminous cults of godlike leaders whether Kim Il Sung or Mobutu...

**Donal** Arrogant metropolitan-centred sectarian ultimatism!

**Jackie** ... These are the results of the failure of the communist programme to put the world economy under working-class control and develop it harmoniously.

**Mick** This is a very old question. Read the Communist Manifesto, where Marx and Engels put the communist programme of 'accepting' and superseding the capitalist industrial system rather than harking back to the previous — and humanly better — system. The task was to seize what capitalism had created. The same approach was advocated by Lenin in 'Imperialism'.

**Mick** The central point about 'anti-imperialism' is that it is ideologically classless, and therefore has a tendency to get filled with non-working-class content. The 'natural' content of anti-imperialism for large parts of the world, you might say, is petty bourgeois populism with a lacing of Stalinist/Maoist ideas of national self-sufficiency and autarky.

Like all negative positions it leaves unanswered key questions, like what we want to replace imperialism by — and these are the decisive questions from a class point of view. More than that, though, because of course many different forces and classes can be 'anti-imperialist'.

The Boers who rule South Africa were irreconcilable opponents of what they called 'British imperialism'. Many of them were interned during World War 2 for opposing the British war effort. Some of them were genuine anti-imperialists, though a million miles away from us politically.

Indeed, 'anti-imperialism' is the dominant ideology of the Third World — held by petty bourgeois, bourgeois, and by would-be regional imperialists like the Argentine junta — or the South African Nationalists.

**Tony** Outrageous. Argentina is an oppressed country, not a sub-imperialism.

**Jackie** Of course, Tony! As I was saying, the content of 'anti-imperialism' is usually anti-colonial — in a world where there are few colonies left; or else, the implied content is anti-international-market. It is ideologically a mishmash in which the question of what is working-class anti-

imperialism and how it is distinguished from all other 'anti-imperialisms' is cardinal. That's why the Communist International document is of the greatest importance today.

In practice 'anti-imperialism' results in a mishmash whose 'left' lowest common denominator is populism — with implications of a reactionary programme of economic autarky, its heavy stress on nations as oppressed (even when they are politically independent, and sometimes themselves minor oppressors), and therefore having a common national interest against 'The Great Satan', or whatever.

Inevitably, it is not too far along this road to the idea of good and bad peoples, and one of the by-products of this poisoned anti-imperialism has been the growth of anti-semitism on the left in recent years. The Israeli Jews are a bad people, and therefore they must be overrun.

**Tony** You're a Zionist!

**Mick** Better that than to be the holder of implicit anti-semitic positions — of an anti-semitism which dares not speak its name, but is just as venomous as it ever was in its Christian or racist versions.

**'The central point about "anti-imperialism" is that it is ideologically classless, and therefore has a tendency to get filled with non-working-class content. The "natural" content of anti-imperialism for large parts of the world, you might say, is petty-bourgeois populism'.**

**Donal** There may be some truth in that, in general, but for Ireland it's just a way for you to ward off the permanent revolution. But you can't! The said process keeps on happening, and it is clearing a way for itself. Your observation about what you call populist anti-imperialism...

**Mick** ... nameless, classless anti-imperialism...

**Donal** ... your observation stops you seeing the permanent revolution even when it rises up in front of you as big as the side of a battleship, as it is doing in Ireland today.

**Jackie** A spectre is haunting Ireland, the spectre of... nameless, classless anti-imperialism. A real spectre that doesn't come to grips with Irish realities at all!

**Donal** You have no analysis of the material forces in the struggle, and therefore you don't understand the process that is going on. You have to be a real Marxist to do that. None of you are. You understand nothing of what's going on in Ireland now.

**Mick** Yes, Donal: Marxism allows you to make a scenario out of the events going on

in Ireland now — extrapolating forward to an imaginary time in the future.

You don't look at things as they are and as they are most likely to develop; you look, so to speak, backwards in time from the imaginary future, and you evaluate the things in the world you inhabit from the viewpoint of that imaginary future.

The compulsory optimism and the dogmatism grinds out of you and your co-thinkers that native intelligence that everyone with an IQ higher than a dog would bring to discussing Ireland. Someone said 'the past is a foreign country'. Your scenario renders the present a foreign country to you.

You are literally not people living in Ireland: you live in a world of your own!

You seem to hold the teleological view that there is a conscious purpose in history, and that you have read its schedule of coming events. You firmly believe that there is some magic force at work unseen to arrange and control the seeming horrors around us so that there will somehow be a happy ending.

You sit in your imaginary teleological throne in the sky, thinking you know the future. Donal, you don't even know, can't register, can't take in, can't respond to, the present!

That's the significance of 'permanent revolution' for you — a teleological world drama worked out in advance. You think it is worked out by some godlike spirit of history. In fact it is worked out by yourselves — more fallible and with no control over events.

**Jackie** With less control of events than you might have if you would face reality and stop fantasising!

The proof of what I've said is that you need such quasi-religious scenarios, which are to Marxism what religion is to science. What did Marx write about religion? The heart of a heartless world, the sigh of the oppressed in this vale of woe, the opium of the people. A fantasy to escape the harsh

realities of the real world.

And what did Marx object to about that? Marx said that he did not wish to rip off the flowers from the chain so that the slaves would wear the chain without consolations — but so that they would see things clearly and break their chains.

Your religious 'Marxism', Donal, is just a variant of consoling cant!

**Donal** That's just a rehash of the hoariest old academic attacks on Marxism — that it's all religion, the dialectic is the Christian Trinity in disguise, and so on. You describe Marxism as religion! All Marxists relate to the present in terms of a conception of what will be made out of it — the working-class transformation.

**Jackie** Not Marxism, Donal — the wretched combination of chopped-up dogmas, scholastic theorising and de facto accommodation to all sorts of alien, anti-working-class forces in the world, from Khomeini to Castro. The point is that you weave the world around you into a weird and utterly fantastic scenario, and then read that back so that you can't see the world around you. There is no comparison with what classical Marxism does.

**Robert** Did you ever see a movie called 'Never On A Sunday', Donal? It had that woman who's now the Greek government's Minister of Culture in it, the one who's making all the fuss about the return of the Elgin Marbles to Greece.

**Donal** Yes, now that you mention it. But couldn't we stick to the subject? This is a serious discussion. Who cares about old movies?

**Robert** I am sticking to the subject. Bear with me a moment, Donal. The movie is about a strange woman, a sort of 'life-force', 'Mother Earth' character called, I

think, Iliia. She is a prostitute in the Athenian port of Piraeus who takes up with a visiting American.

Iliia loves the ancient Greek drama, and regularly goes to see it performed. But Iliia doesn't see the world like other people, as the fascinated American finds out.

Out on the stage, Medea may have just slaughtered her own children to get revenge on their father Jason, in an unbearably tragic series of events. But what do you think Iliia makes of that? She sits there laughing and giggling.

When the Yank asks why she is laughing at the horrors in the amphitheatre, she tells him derisively that it never happened, it's not real, they're not really dead. In fact "they've all gone to the sea shore".

Now do you see the point, Donal? Do you see yourself in it? You look at the horrors in Northern Ireland, the certainty of sectarian civil war if the British were just to pull out, the steady trickle of sectarian assassinations, the incidents of anti-Protestant Catholic sectarianism along the Border in Catholic country — you look at all that, and what do you see? Not sectarian slaughter and looming catastrophe — you see the permanent revolution.

It's not really happening, what I've described. They've all gone to the sea shore. We'll all go to the sea shore if the balloon goes up in Northern Ireland. Or maybe it's to Fiddlers Green we'll go.

**Jackie** You're a 'Never On A Sunday' Trotskyist, Donal!

**Donal** All these silly analogies! Don't you know that Marxism deals in the concrete, not in abstract fantasies and speculations. I have no time for this sort of would-be smart-arsed nonsense. Deal with the concrete and precise questions I have put before you.

**Jackie** I suggest we take a break at this point.

## Discussion with Donal R: Part 2

**Donal.** Let's take the question of Protestant/Catholic unity. That's where you really show yourselves up. You accuse me of tailending the Republicans.

**Patrick** The neo-Republicans!

**Donal** Whatever. Yet you are the ones who are hag-ridden with *right-wing* Republican myths about the unity of the Irish people. Your talk about working-class unity is part of that.

**Mick** Why right wing?

**Donal** Well, that's the stuff the old Republican leaders tried to base themselves on, the ones who wanted federalism so that they could continue to have their Catholic, backward, southern statelet — to protect them from the spectre of permanent revolution.

Those people live on myths about 1798 and so on when Protestants and Catholics were united. But it's just not true. John O'Mahony makes the same error in his stuff in SO about the Protestants once being in the Republican vanguard. No, they were always what they are now — colons!

Though the Presbyterian left led the Irish national revolution for a couple of months in '98, most of its members did so looking over their shoulders. Did you know that the famous battle of Ballinahinch was lost because Henry Monroe, the hero of a well-known Republican song, was afraid to use

Catholic troops?

They knew they were colons even then. And they know it now. Yet you people want unity with a pro-imperialist section of the working class, a section that opposes imperialism if at all from the right.

**Jimmy** So you think the United Irishmen was a hopeless enterprise? Wolfe Tone's programme of substituting the common name of Irishman for that of Protestant, Dissenter and Catholic. That was all hopeless, was it? At last you are consistent.

**Donal** Myths never did anybody any good. They have always felt themselves to be colons. They have always been terrified of a repetition of the Catholic rising of 1641 or of the Catholic Parliament of 1689. That's the truth, and it's the truth about the said rebellion of 1798. Fear of displacement was the material interest at the back of their fear of being absorbed into a priest-ridden Catholic state.

**Mick** So what do you think are the lessons of 1690 and 1641 for the Catholics today? Is it still the same 'counter-attack' — with the same objectives? We touched on this before you arrived because it seems to some of us that the logic of what the Provos are now saying amounts to the slogan 'Back to the Jacobite Parliament of 1689'. To us the Provos seem to be trying to take Irish politics back to before Wolfe Tone's attempt to supersede the old divisions and replace them

with the common name of Irish. In your own strange way. Donal, you seem to be agreeing with us.

**Donal** No I'm not. There is now no displaced Catholic peasantry wanting to return to their lands. I don't want to drive the Protestants out. All the contradictions will be resolved in the unfolding of the permanent revolution.

**Mick** And what do you think are the lessons of 1689-90 and 1641 for the Protestants? They, of course, as they say and daub on walls around here, still 'Remember 1690'. And they remember 1641 too.

**Jimmy** And they remember the Mother and Child Act of 1951!

**Mick** Don't you think they need to be told in the most unequivocal way by the majority Irish community, of which the Six Counties Catholics are part, that it is not and never will be 1641 or 1690 again? Yet you say that any proposal now to reassure them, with federalism for example, is positively harmful.

**Donal** It's against the permanent revolution perspective, I've told you already. You rely on reform proposals to solve the contradictions. We rely on the unfolding of permanent revolution and on the power of the said process to mobilise the Irish people and at the tail end the Protestants.



The Provos' military campaign is the great locomotive here, not stupid and reformist proposals like yours to unite the Irish people, backward and progressive sections alike. As I said, that's what screwed up the Workers' Party, Conor Cruise O'Brien, the British and Irish Communist Organisation, etc — accommodating to the backward national minority and to its privileged working class.

**Mick** But you agree with federalism!

**Donal** As a possible tactic at the end of the process — not as a principle.

**Mick** Not as a right of the minority, but as something the tacticians of the majority — the self-appointed tacticians, as it happens, but let that pass — may find useful to manipulate the minority with.

**Donal** Exactly!

**Jackie** I've got some sympathy with what you said about 1798, Donal, oddly enough. You are right that myths are mainly harmful, or at any rate they should have no part in the politics or historiography of Marxists. And historiography in Ireland is still a long way from having emerged from the realm of myth.

**Robert** Yes. Let's not make myths about '98. For example, the great Wexford Catholic rising included sectarian outrages committed against Protestants, of whom there were sizeable numbers in parts of Wexford.

**Jackie** But I think, Donal, that you are too dismissive of the Protestant radicals. They were Jacobin Republicans, fighting for Catholic/Protestant equality. They could have roused the people of Ireland, and the religious questions could have been sunk in a common war against the landlords and a revolutionary-democratic constitutional arrangement.

**Patrick** The truth is that '98 was not one movement, but a number of different and separate movements — a Catholic jacquerie in Wexford, a revolutionary war waged by French troops and local people in the West, and a movement mainly of Presbyterian plebeians in the North. Ireland was still a complex of regions, as Wolfe Tone, for example, understood very well. He had no illusions that a single nation was ready-forged. The job of the United Irishmen was to forge it.

But your explanation, Donal, in terms of the ab ovo nature of the Protestants as colonists, is a very strange one. I don't know much about the battle of Ballinahinch — but these were the Republican revolutionaries, those who — unlike, for example, most of the Catholic peasants who rose in the South East — consciously held to the programme of the United Irishmen.

But you seem to argue that it was all hopeless. It was preordained that those whom you dismiss as colonists *could not have* been the leaven in a great nation-creating movement. Republicanism only became real Republicanism and developed real (permanent revolution!) prospects, so to speak, when it crossed over from one Irish community to the other and equipped itself to understand that it had to confront the old Republican vanguard, the 'colons', as an imperious force telling them roughly to come into a Catholic nation and its unitary state, or get out of Ireland.

**Donal** You are the ones who talk of a Catholic nation, not me.

**Jackie** Yes, Donal, you do, as I'll prove in a minute.

**Patrick** But let me continue. By explaining the failure of 1798 in terms of 'the colons' you let the Irish middle-class radicals off the hook — which is pretty much what you do today with your use of 'permanent revolution' to dress up what they do.

1798 failed centrally because the United Irish organisation fell apart and because it was unable to bring any sort of integration and coherence to the disparate parts of the rebellion.

**Jimmy** They tried, but the British oligarchy was strong enough to smash them.

**'Miraculously, you believe that Irish unity will cease to be a delusion in the near future.**

**Why? How? What an agrarian revolution in 1798 could not have done, the magic of armed struggle, of physical-force-on-principle (though that isn't your way of putting it) will surely do — and soon.**

**There is no reason to believe any of this. The quasi-rational version of it — that the Protestants can be bludgeoned by the far from magical Provo war — is less up in the clouds, I suppose. But it also is fantastic. It can't and won't happen. And it shouldn't'.**

**Patrick** Yes, but why was that? Fear of the peasants was not just a sectarian colonist reflex, Donal, it was a deep class reflex on the part of large sections of the the middle class radicals. Only a thorough-going agrarian revolution — the victory of the jacquerie and its unity with the radical bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie of the towns — could have fused the disparate people of Ireland into a coherent unified Irish nation such as Tone talked of when he wanted to substitute the name Irish for the religious denominations which reflected ethnic and national origins.

It was not just that the British terror was so ruthless and effective, and there is no denying it was. It didn't stop the various risings from happening, though maybe it stopped others. And it wasn't just that many in the middle class felt themselves divided by race and creed from the Catholic peasantry, though they did, and were inhibited by it.

It was *also* the whole nature of the middle class as revolutionaries. We have seen the same phenomenon all through subsequent Irish history, down to 1916, when the Home Rule bourgeoisie screamed for the British to shoot more of the captured insurgent leaders and, in the first place, James Connolly.

**Mick** I'm not sure you aren't being a-historical. What are you saying? That the United Irishmen weren't the Bolshevik Party? Not a tightly-knit group of professional revolutionaries?

**Patrick** Obviously there is a danger of being a-historical and anachronistic. Nobody can detract from the honour and glory of the United Irishmen in founding modern secular Irish politics. I think I'm defending their heritage against the Provo neo-Republicans and their Catholic nationalism, and against the romantic kitsch-Trotskyist muddleheads.

**Tony Oil**

**Patrick** But still, the United Irishmen were a movement of a given class and time. Different editions of Republicanism over two centuries have been made by different classes. Looking back you can see what a gap there was in the United Irish movement, and I think you should lay it at the door of the middle class radicals, of whom the United Irishmen were the vanguard.

**Donal** If I agree with this, it just reinforces what I've said: the colony, and it wasn't just the Ulster colony, produced most of the middle class. They looked over their shoulders at the Catholics. That, at least, was part of it.

**Jackie** Part of it, maybe. But you explain it in national and racial terms (in the sense that James Connolly and others used the word race) — not in class terms. *Which is what you do in modern politics!*

**Donal** No, we are all Irish. I say that the Protestants of Northern Ireland are a national minority.

**Jackie** You say more than that, whether you know it or not. Follow through the logic of what you say about 1798. Draw a line between what you say now and what you say about 1798 — and you are saying quite plainly that there was always a fundamental flaw. Even at the best juncture in Irish history for nation-creating, it was that flaw which made the nation-creating revolution impossible.

You are saying that the Irish Republican programme for a 32 County all-Ireland Republic was always a myth and a fantasy.

**Donal** I know what my words mean.

**Mick** Like Alice in Wonderland — the words mean exactly what I say they mean!

**Jackie** If it was always a myth, then that surely has some bearing on what is going on today. The 32 County Irish Republic never existed even as a serious possibility — it was just a delusion. That may be a reasonable view of history — though I've told you why I think it is not the entire picture.

But *if* you are right, then your hopes for

the future are utterly fantastic and your comments about now are vilest Catholic chauvinist drivel dressed up in fine phrases about permanent revolution and socialism.

**Donal** Better that than subscribe to right-wing — and 'classless' — Republican mythology, with its corollary that right now we must choose to work for working-class unity instead of permanent revolution.

**Jackie** Tone was a 'right-wing Republican'! But let me finish the point. You say that for all time past and even now the 32 County Republic is a myth. The possibility of Irish unity has been a delusion. You believe it was a delusion even when it was objectively possible — in the 1790s — to fuse the Irish plebeian masses together in the white heat of an immense agrarian revolution against the quasi-feudal relations on most of Ireland's land, a movement into which the Protestant farmers would surely have been drawn.

But, miraculously, you believe that Irish unity will cease to be a delusion in the near future.

Why? How? What an agrarian revolution in '98 could not have done, the magic of armed struggle, of physical-force-on-principle (though that isn't your way of putting it) will surely do — and soon.

There is no reason to believe any of this. The quasi-rational version of it — that the Protestants can be bludgeoned by the far from magical Provo war — is less up in the clouds, I suppose. But it also is fantastic. It can't and won't happen. And it shouldn't.

What your view of the past says about *now* is that the Northern Ireland Protestant community is a quite distinct people who have never been close to the Irish majority. They have never even paralleled them, not even as a potential ally to make a bourgeois-democratic revolution. The idea that some process of permanent revolution will magically change this is witch-doctor stuff.

You destroy any justification for the war you support other than the coercing of the Protestants into a united Ireland — which you describe as the work of forwarding the permanent revolution.

Your picture is one of two distinct peoples, one of which you consign to the role of a bad people, a bad nation or a bad national minority. And to this you give the name permanent revolution and say it holds out the prospect of a revolutionary unity of the Irish working class!

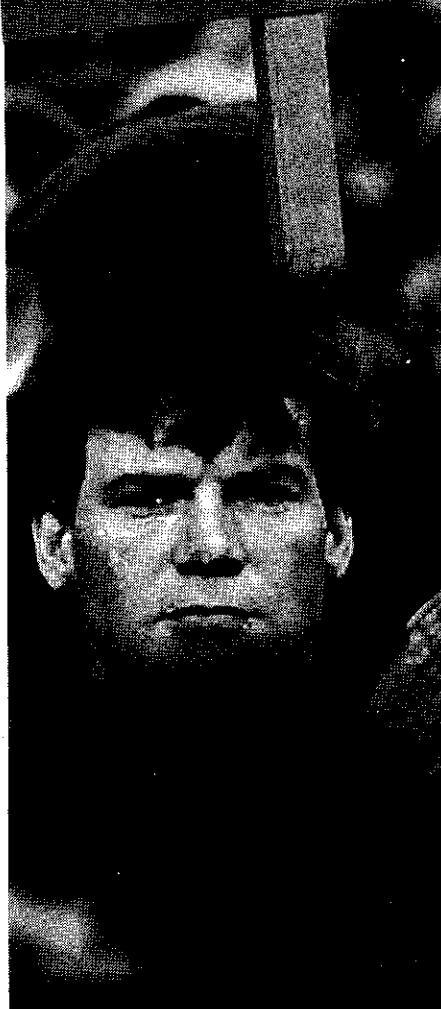
**Donal** This way of arguing is almost Healyite. You extrapolate wildly from what I say and then attribute the extrapolation to me, saying, 'There, that's your real opinion'. Apart from being Healyite, it isn't serious. I know my own opinion better than you do.

**Jackie** I don't say this are your real, hidden, secret opinion. I say this is the logic of what you say. It is what it amounts to if you think it through logically. You confine yourself to hints and half-thoughts. That's what's unserious.

The logic of what you say isn't your property — it exists whether you recognise it or not. As the saying goes: who says A, must say B. And if you don't say B having said A, then I have a right to say it is nevertheless what follows on logically from what do you say.

**Donal** It's your general approach to Irish history which is unserious. I refuted O'Mahony's historiography in SO and no-one replied. I showed that O'Mahony's account of how the Protestant colony came to Antrim and Down was Unionist propaganda. He didn't reply. I argue that working-class

**ULSTER  
SAYS  
NO**



Orangeism arose because the defeat of trade unionism in the North and the pauperisation of the Orange working class.

Nobody replied.

**Mick** Most of these points were taken up in SO, Donal. However, I have a problem. Undoubtedly these are very important questions. But to have a right to express an opinion on these, so to speak, technical questions of history, you have to do a very great deal of work, probably original research. That isn't an option for most of us. We have to rely on the published sources.

To take sides on these questions of historical detail for *political* reasons, because of the political implications of one or another idea, would be shameful — unserious and un-Marxist. It would be the Stalinist 'useful lie' applied to distant history.

But how do you use these questions of history, Donal? You use them to pettifog and procrastinate and nibble at the edges of the gigantic contemporary fact of a distinct 'Protestant' identity. You use abstruse, and, it seems to me, rather esoteric historical details to deny the self-evident facts of today, or to avoid facing them head-on.

**Jackie** I too think these historical questions are very important. Like Mick, I haven't got time to do the work necessary to take them up as they deserve to be taken up, or the money to do original research. I have to rely on the work of others. But to speak candidly, Donal R, I don't trust your accounts of any of these questions.

I remember reading articles of yours at the beginning of the 1970s (in the Dublin magazine *Workers' Republic*, I think) which argued that the Ulster Volunteer Force of 1912-14 was just an army of scabs — 100,000 or more of them. It was gibberish!

**Patrick** Sounds a bit more like wartime propaganda than serious social history, Donal.

**Donal** Those were serious articles. I did a lot of research for them. Besides, those opinions were pretty much in line with what Lenin wrote at the time. Refute them, don't abuse them!

You don't use the Marxist method — the method of historical materialism. That's why you go wrong in the present. You can only understand the present in terms of the past.

You can't take a snap shot of the present and say, 'There, that's it'. That's not adequate. You need to construct a historical motion picture, so to speak, in which the situation now is only the latest still life...

**Jackie** And you need to construct a motion picture of the future too, so that you know what the proper meaning of the events around you is, eh, Donal R?

**Donal** Exactly.

**Jackie** Yes, exactly, in general. You do need a historical motion picture. But someone who refuses to face the facts rationally now and says that understanding things 300 years ago is more important, that the colon origin of the Protestants has any bearing on our attitude to them now, is a pettifogger and a muddler who uses historical, or perhaps pseudo-historical, pedantry to obscure present-day reality. That's not Marxism.

**Patrick** No matter how the Protestants got to be in Antrim and Down and the rest of Ireland, there is no gainsaying that they are there now. They have the right to be there and should from the point of view of democracy have a high degree of control over how they live and govern themselves there.

Even if they established themselves initial-

