

IS AND IRELAND. A reply to the Workers' Fight pamphlet "IS and Ireland"

"The text of the seriousness, the maturity, the honesty and the ultimate viability of any revolutionary organisation is its attitudes to its own mistakes..... . Those who are not serious or who are first concerned with face, prestige, and factional self defence seek above all to evade an honest accounting: they subordinate fundamental questions of method and approach to what are essentially secondary, and in the final analysis, unimportant considerations."

The above text serves as the preface to the attack made by Comrade Matgamna, on behalf of his "Trotskyist" tendency in the internal pamphlet "IS and Ireland". It is an excellent text and should be burned on the consciousness of all the comrades. Not least Comrade Matgamna. The text has a particular relevance to the Group's work regarding the Irish situation and the Irish campaign in Britain. In this respect it is important that comrades are reminded that the Group's "Trotskyist" critics do not start from a disinterested position. The "Trotskyist" tendency has its own faction boat to row in Ireland. Indeed basic to the criticisms raised by Comrade Matgamna in his pamphlet are the criticisms raised of him in the recent period by his proteges in the League for a Workers' Republic. We will see this clearly when we deal with Comrades Matgamna's thoughts on solidarity with the Irish comrades and the programmatic basis for such solidarity.

There are basically two criticisms and only two which can be made of the Group's Irish work. Either by its policies and actions IS retarded the building of a revolutionary socialist movement or, alternatively, that it consciously obstructed such a development. Comrade Matgamna never makes clear which he believes. At times, depending on his criticisms, one is invited to draw the latter conclusion.

Firstly to deal with Comrade Matgamna's specific criticisms. They can be summarised as follows.

a) IS refused to take an Irish campaign in Britain seriously until the election of Bernadette Devlin.

b) The programme for the Irish campaign was (variously) neither nationalist enough, nor socialist enough.

c) IS took a counter revolutionary line in SUPPORTING the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland.

d) IS refused to support a principled line on the national question by refusing to support the demand for Catholic secession.

e) That certain members of the IS Executive obstructed moves towards the formation of a united revolutionary socialist group in Ireland.

In making these criticisms, cde. Matgamna and the "Trotskyist" Tendency is forced, as we shall see, into blatantly contradictory positions. That, in addition to cde. Matgamna's refusal to tell the comrades the whole truth about the policies of his League for a Workers' Republic, indicates that the "Trotskyist" Tendency is motivated (in cde. Matgamna's words in the preface) "a factional self defence" which "evades honest accounting" and "subordinates questions of method and approach to what are essentially secondary and in the final analysis, unimportant considerations."

Points a) and b) : The Irish Campaign and its programme

Comrade Matgamna's criticisms here are simply not borne out by the facts. The truth is that from December 1966 well into last year the Group had conducted attempts to get an Irish campaign going at least in the areas of Irish concentration. The truth of the matter is that none of the attempts had significant success; the issue simply did not attract public interest. The failure to get public support (from either Irish or British workers) was no different in the areas where the "Trotskyist" Tendency had support. During that time, however, thousands of leaflets were produced and dozens of meetings addressed by NC members were held. The charge of "not taking the Irish campaign seriously" is a blatant attempt to re-write history for factional purposes.

It is quite true that Devlin's election and the escalation of events in the six counties

which followed later transformed the situation in Britain. No one can seriously doubt this. At this point a solidarity campaign became a viable proposition. IS in London and a number of provincial centres helped to launch what became the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign with a group of People's Democracy sympathisers in London and a number of unattached British and Irish socialists. The ICRSC in the ensuing months produced tens of thousands of leaflets, held a number of mass demonstrations (including one of several thousands), held literally hundreds of meetings (including many on site and factory gate meetings), established links with sympathetic trade union bodies, collected funds for the struggle in the six counties and formed some 10 branches. IS played a leading role in the ICRSC in providing speakers and writers. Directly and indirectly (through out educational work in ICRSC) many Irish militants were brought into touch with IS and, in London at least, a number have now joined our organisation.

All this stands in contrast with the refusal of Manchester (1) where there is a big local Irish population and where the Trotskyist tendency provided the local leadership to build the ICRSC. To be fair, there has been a similar refusal by some of the Scottish comrades, who have in our view an ultra left attitude to the Irish question. There can be no doubt that the “Trotskyist” tendency put their factional loyalties before that of IS in their refusal to build ICRSC.

The early discussions about the programme for ICRSC (and before that for the abortive IS Irish campaign) did not always make the distinction clear between what should be IS policy on Ireland and what should be the policy of a solidarity campaign. From the start of ICRSC IS has made it clear that it believes that only solution for the working people of Ireland – north or south, Catholic or Protestant – is the establishment of an Irish Workers' Republic. As socialists we know in our epoch this is the only form of self-determination that is meaningful for the Irish working class. As socialists in an imperialist country we have the elementary duty to support this right of self-determination without qualification. This we did through the ICRSC which adopted a programme of the militant civil rights movement. Does cde. Matgamna really believe that in a solidarity movement we should have insisted that it had to have a full socialist position on the struggle in Ireland? Apart from the sectarianism of such a stand it would also have effectively prohibited us reaching and mobilising a significant number of people for the Irish campaign. For the same reason, in the early stage of the civil rights struggle it was necessary for us to support all the genuinely anti-unionist forces. However, we recognised that PD were, even then, the most consistent and militant wing of the civil rights movement.

Cde. Matgamna shows great confusion when he deals with the question of programme. He emphasises that the programme of the ICRSC – which was moved by IS – changed, not least on the question of troops. The troops we will deal with later. As for the solidarity programme as a whole, of course it changed, because the situation in Northern Ireland changed. Prior to the concessions after the summer fighting which were insisted on by Callaghan and the British government, the civil rights movement was operating at two levels. On the one hand it was protesting against discrimination (irrespective of class) against Catholics by the Orange regime. Secondly, even then a section of the civil rights movement was protesting about the social and economic shortages which were a consequence of the crisis in the northern Ireland economy. The first mainly interested the Catholic middle class, the second the Catholic working class. As cde. Matgamna's own historical survey in his pamphlet states it was in the interest of British capitalism to “normalise” the situation of the Catholics in the six counties as part of the British policy of the more total integration into British capitalism of the whole Irish economy.

At no stage did the NC of the IS, or any individual on it, suggest that the struggles against the religious sectarian allocation of jobs and houses and bourgeois democratic rights would lead “directly and in the not too distant future” to the achievement of a workers' republic. It became a different question after the granting of the reforms. It is true that the only direction the movement for more houses, jobs etc. (the struggle against the whole quality of life under capitalism in Northern Ireland) can take is a socialist one. IN THAT SENSE THE ONLY WAY FORWARD FOR THE MILITANT CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IS THE BUILDING OF A SOCIALIST MOVEMENT. This is all the more true because all the Green bourgeois political tendencies in the six counties have abandoned civil rights in the interests of the developing rapprochement between London and Dublin. (The federal solution as part of a joint British-Irish Common Market strategy). Especially since the rapprochement promises the Catholic middle class a better place in the sun in Northern Ireland in the meanwhile.

Point c): Workers' Fight and The Troops – writing a minus where the bourgeois writes a plus.

The relationship between the national, anti-imperialist struggle and the class struggle is always complex. It was a problem which Connolly never satisfactorily resolved. Last year in Ireland socialists also had to appreciate the complex relation between the

struggle against imperialism and capitalism, and the struggle against British imperialism's former agents of rule, the Orange-Paisleyite power structure. This relation was made especially complex by the struggle between the latter and British imperialism; we should not forget that even today the Paisleyite/UVF forces probably have more men at their disposal under arms/with access to them in Northern Ireland than either the Catholics or the British Army.

It is the inability of Matgamna et al to appreciate this aspect of the situation in any other way than by (inadequately) describing it which leads him to the position of insisting that we should have demanded the IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH TROOPS last August in a situation where Paisleyite pogroms were being launched. The fact is that we, as revolutionary socialists, at that point had parallel interests with the British bourgeois state in wishing the defeat of Paisleyite mob power. However shocking it may be to the tender consciences of those who cannot bare to see the realities of actual working class interests, bluntly it was not in our interests at that stage to promote any armed conflict between the Civil Rights movement and the British troops. The best reply to the shrieks which this simple statement will provoke from the self styled "Trotskyists" is to be found, as usual, in the words of Trotsky himself:

"An irreconcilable attitude against bourgeois militarism does not signify at all that the proletariat in all cases enters into a struggle against its own 'national' army... . If the French fascists should make an attempt today at a coup d'etat and the Daladier government found itself forced to move troops against the fascists, the revolutionary workers, while maintaining their complete political independence, would fight against the fascists alongside of those troops. Thus in a number of cases the workers are forced not only to permit and tolerate but actively to support the practical measures of the bourgeois government.

"In 90 cases out of 100 the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases, however, they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie. The policy of the proletariat is not at all derived automatically from the policy of the bourgeoisie bearing only the opposite sign – this would make every sectarian a master strategist; no, the revolutionary party must each time orient itself independently in the internal as well as in the external situation, arriving at those decisions which correspond best to the interests of the proletariat. This rule applies just

as much as to the war period as to the time of peace.”

“Let us imagine that in the next European war, the Belgian proletariat seizes power sooner than the proletariat of France”. (Trotsky goes on to explain that the French bourgeoisie could send them arms to use against Hitler in this hypothetical situation, while preserving political independence)... . “The revolutionary party's chief task is to utilise the contradiction between two imperialist powers in order to save proletarian Belgium.”

It was similar considerations which prompted Lenin to oppose the slogan of immediate overthrow of the provisional government when faced by the white onslaught of Kornilov, and which led Trotsky to oppose the demand for the immediate overthrow of the Prussian Social Democratic government when faced with the Nazi bid for power. In both cases their objective remained the overthrow of these governments. In the actual process of building a movement prepared and able to do this, Lenin and Trotsky saw the need to use the contradictions in the enemy camp for the advantage of the workers' movement. The objective of revolutionary socialists in Ireland remained the overthrow of British Imperialism and both its satrap statelets. This in no way prevents, and in the actual circumstances it demanded that socialists exploit the differences between Westminster and Paisleyism's power base.

The left wing in the Catholic working class (socialists and left republicans) have used the period since to strengthen their ability to defend themselves. (Matgamna perceptively identifies the difficulties in the way of doing this which a cordon of British troops constitutes. We are sure that those who have nevertheless managed to improve their defences would assure him that six foot of earth and a Paisleyite bullet are graver obstacles yet). PD also have used the months to try and develop their base, both organisationally and politically. Neither would have been possible under conditions of a religious civil war between Catholics and Protestants. **THAT IS THE JUSTIFICATION OF OUR REFUSAL TO WAGE A CAMPAIGN FOR THE IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS.**

Contrary to Matgamna's implications, that was also the position of every political tendency in the 6 counties, including not only PD and the Republicans but the group around Eamonn McCann whom Matgamna now looks upon with favour. Nor did the 6

county extensions of the British sects which raised the demand do anything in Ulster to campaign around it.

The Matgannaite argument, or rather assertion, that this position amounts to one of support for the troops rests on a lying distortion of the facts and an ultra-left and scholastic misunderstanding of the Marxist method.

As always, sectarianism is the other side of the coin to opportunism; the arguments of cde. Matganna do demonstrate quite clearly that he can conceive of no alternative to demanding the withdrawal of the troops other than to support them, but this is a comment on his approach and not on ours. In fact, as their tedious recitation of truisms around the question of Martynov, propaganda and agitation, makes painfully clear, they confuse two different propositions on this question. The first proposition, the correct one, is that there must be no contradiction between strategy and tactics, propaganda and agitation, headlines and text, or between any of the forms of communication of a socialist organisation. The second proposition, confounded with the first, is that there must be no difference in the slogans etc. advanced in different situations, whatever the objective situation, relation of forces, contradictions in the enemy camp etc. Thus they confound opposition to a stages theory with the denial that stages exist at all. That is why the WF pamphlet makes the absurd comparison between the IS position and that of the Stalinists in Spain. There is one little difference. In Spain the Stalinists argued from the parallel interests of the liberal bourgeoisie and of the workers in the defeat of Fascism, to demanding the subordination and indeed the liquidation of all independent centres of working class power politically, militarily and industrially, to the bourgeoisie their army and state. As a result, the bourgeoisie turned on the workers and smashed them, and capitulated to France. In Ireland IS conceded that the immediate threat from the Paisleyite armed gangs was greater than it was from the British troops, but argued against any demobilisation politically or militarily, called for no confidence in concessions to the troops, constantly warned that once they had contained Paisleyism they would turn on the Catholic workers and the Left, and called for the extension of the struggle to the South. The comparison of the IS line with that of the Spanish Stalinist or even with Schachtman's line of giving political support to the Spanish bourgeoisie is a blatant dishonesty more worthy of the professional liars of the Workers' Press than of what poses as an argument in good faith from a loyal member of our own organisation.

In pursuit of this distortion that the IS line meant support of the troops, Matganna is

compelled to imply that our demands for maintenance of independent Catholic working-class mobilisation were more occasional references 'buried in the body of the text'. The opposite is the case as any objective reading of a file of Socialist Worker would show. What is more these demands were integrated into a socialist strategy for the spreading of the struggle to the South in a class form, by the seizing of British factories and estates, to which Matgamna and the LWR were opposed at the time. Matgamna confessed in private conversation at the time of the IS September conference that he thought the seizure demand was 'Chauvinist' and similar views were expressed soon after by Paddy Healy in Dublin. Of course the 'internationalist' alternative of these comrades was....secession! To set the record straight we shall quote from a typical SW editorial of the period (October 2nd). Headed 'Troops use gas on Catholics as Orangemen attack' it reads in part:-

“Catholics in the ghetto cannot engage in a struggle to throw out the British troops at the moment. Reality forces them to take account of the difference of opinion between Callaghan and Paisley on how to preserve the Stormont regime.

This is to their advantage insofar as it gives them time to prepare their fight back. Without it many would be dead, and many more burnt out.

But this does not mean putting any trust in the troops. After all they have been trained in the past - in Aden in Cyprus, in Kenya - to terrorise populations in exactly the manner of the B Specials. The events of the last Saturday night showed that the Catholic workers can in no way depend on the determination or ability of British troops to defend them, let alone act in their interests. That is why the barricades have been rebuilt: that is why they must be defended against troops as well as Orangemen.

But the workers defending the barricades face one central problem; their weakness, isolation and shortage of arms.

Only the opening of a second front against British Imperialism in Southern Ireland can overcome this. The demand for the opening of the 'free state' armouries to provide self-defence for those under threat must be raised. So must the demand for the seizure of British factories and properties in the South as ransom for the lives of those in the

ghettoes."

To what 'immediate action' did IS call those behind the barricades in articles such as this? Was it action which had no connection with, or which contradicted the building of an all-Ireland movement to force out British imperialism troops and all? Or was it action geared to do precisely that, in a situation where those who held the political initiative were threatened in their physical existence? The question answers itself for all those whose eyes are not blinded by factional bad faith.

Point d) Secession: or 'How Martynov, having rendered Plekhanov more profound, was reborn in IS - as a member of 'Workers' Fight'

Just as the arguments of Workers Fight distort the IS position on the troops into one of support, so also their exercise in retrospective self-justification of their secession demand leads them into the claim that IS's refusal, in common with the entire Irish left except for Matgamna's now rebellious Dublin satraps, to endorse this reactionary absurdity amounts to a failure to give support to the right of self-determination. The comrades of Matzpen long ago broke from those who advanced the demand in pre-1967 Israel, for the secession of the predominantly Arab border areas in Galilee. Perhaps our fearless 'Trotskyist' polemicists would like to accuse these comrades of a lack of support for the right of self-determination of the Palestinians.

The basis of this sophistry is of course another systematic confusion similar to that we have noted on the question of the troops; this time between the defence of the right of self-determination, and the advocacy of that right. Had the Catholics of the 6 counties risen in support of this demand and been prevented from realising it by British imperialism we would no doubt have been obliged to defend their right to secede against British imperialism; but this would in no way have made the demand into a progressive one. In fact the failure of any section of Catholic opinion in the North other than on the extreme right to raise any such demand is itself significant.

The blatantly stages theory underlying this demand is most clearly revealed in the statement issued by the Dublin LWR, which Matgamna studiously refrains from quoting. We reproduce its central statement on the secession question here:

"Socialists are fighting for a revolutionary reunification of the country against imperialism and Irish capitalism, for a workers' republic. But given the lack of a revolutionary party and the corresponding low level of socialist consciousness amongst the working-class, the revolutionary vanguard is forced to make interim demands which would facilitate this struggle in the future, and frustrate the demands of capital at present.

It must be realised that contrary to the ravings of ultra-left and petty-bourgeois 'socialists', North and South, the struggle of the Catholic working class in the six counties is not being waged on socialist demands; the Plough and the Stars is swamped by the tricolour. The slogan of a workers' republic and other socialist demands, which can be educational if raised in a proper manner, are largely irrelevant at present as fighting slogans. There is little doubt that the largely Catholic areas wish to secede into the 26 counties. Such a development would facilitate class unity between Catholic and Protestant workers. There would be no special repression for Catholic workers coming into the 26 counties and the necessity for such repression against Catholics in the remaining areas would be eliminated. The genuine and well-grounded fears of the Protestant workers that they would suffer a diminution of their democratic rights in a United Capitalist Ireland would be allayed by allowing them an autonomous state within a United Ireland. This we are sure would be the best possible outcome of the present situation from a socialist point of view and should be actively pursued by socialists in the six counties."

Note how the writer starts by taking as given the absence of socialist demands and consciousness. Instead of asking how the anti-imperialist aspect of the national struggle can be transformed into a class struggle, the approach which underlay our demand for seizure of British holdings, the LWR passively accept the given situation, and because they have no conception of the dialectical interrelation of national and and class struggle in such a situation, they choose to bring to the force precisely those national demands which have the least anti-imperialist content and the most reactionary consequences? Why so? Because such proposals, sure to lead to an intensification of sectarian conflicts within the working class, to pogroms of Catholics in Protestant areas, and to a closing of ranks in the Orange 'laager', had one other astonishing property; they had absolutely nothing to say to the largest section of the Catholic workers, those in Belfast. Those of us who pointed out these 'minor facts' at the last Conference are accused by Matgamna

of 'a quibble about population densities, a demographic argument for keeping things as they are...that the border we have is the best of all possible borders". Presumably the role of Marxists in Northern Ireland was to act as cartographers to the Orange Order by demanding....better borders. To argue that the distribution of the population is irrelevant to the secession demand is a sure sign that those who advanced it had lost all grip on reality, and all concern for it too. They were reduced to adding to their already long list of systematic distortions of the record by claiming that the IS majority had no other alternative but the platonic demand for the workers republic. They failed to see that the demands for the spreading of the struggle to the South as a class struggle were intended precisely to create the force which could make that demand other than Utopian. A class response in the South would at least create the possibility of a class appeal to Northern workers in the situation thus created, even if the immediate effect of seizure of British property was to increase their British identity. But the situation created by implementation of the secession demand would be one in which class lines would not have sharpened but been blurred, and divided by a river of blood.

In this context we should point out the triviality of the WF assumption that the only basis for fear of pogroms is a 'humanitarian' one. The political impact of internecine fighting within the class, in which the left leadership within the Catholic camp would be the first target of the Orange gunmen, is a political question.

After Matgamna's tedious homilies on the question of demands it is refreshing to turn to the frankness of the Dublin LWR who frankly label the secession demand as 'interim', borrowing the classical vocabulary of social-democratic opportunism. It is precisely this failure to appreciate the nature of transitional demands which vitiates their reactionary secessionist Utopia. They do not approach the question by asking what demands will in the process of struggling for their implementation raise socialist consciousness, but what demands if implemented at all would create an objective situation in which class unity might perhaps be possible in the distant future. In other words they look to other factors than the struggle of the class to save them from a situation which they can see no way to alter. Their failure to understand the nature of a transitional demand is of course directly related in this case to their failure to understand the nature of a transitional regime, for precisely this reason.

More astonishingly still is their shabby excuse for no longer raising the demand in the existing situation. You see, "At one point it could have taken the movement forward.

When the movement itself had receded, the slogan was no longer appropriate" Now what was all that brave talk on the troops question about propaganda and agitation? Whatever became of their insistence on the question of demands that "The content and meaning does not differ according to whether action might be on a mass scale or on a tiny scale"? To say nothing of their criticisms of an NC member who stated that 'tactics are derived from the existing situation'?

For a faction to raise two arguments so based on falsehoods, sophistry and, to be fair, simple ignorance of the Marxist method, as are the WF arguments on the troops and on secession is bad enough. For them to have the foresight to make their two arguments mutually contradictory is at least some comfort, as it saves us any further effort in wading through the misrepresentation, and enables us to return to the real political issues. There are two directions in which one can deviate from the Marxist conception of the programme. The first is by formulating demands which take no regard of the specific situation as it is with all its contradictions. The second is by passively adapting to the existing situation, and posing demands which do not attempt to transcend it. By falling into the first error on the troops and into the second on secession, the comrades of Workers Fight refute themselves so neatly as to relieve their opponents of any further obligation to pursue the arguments of their reasoning. Their only achievement has been, by laying a smokescreen of sophistical irrelevancies which had to be answered in the interests of political hygiene, to distract attention, time and energy in the Group from the more serious questions of the future of the Irish movement to which we now return, and on which, to be fair, the comrades of workers' fight also have, with the exception of their pamphlet, been attempting to concentrate in recent months.

Point e) : The future of the Irish movement

Given the above and the blinkered sectarianism of cde. Matgamna's proteges in Dublin it is not difficult to see why his policies have made no headway in Ireland. This is not to deny that PD's evolution is without problems. PD's basic line has been correct - particularly since they abandoned an abstentionist line on the border. This is reflected in the growing convergence of PD and what Matgamna admits are "the best young left republicans". This convergence cannot but be assisted by the Stormont repressions against republicans and PD members (one of whom is in prison at this time of writing), and also by the split in the republican movement. Perhaps this is why IN THE NORTH PD continues to make ground. Days after Matgamna's pamphlet spoke of McCann's base

in Derry where PD had nothing, PD formed a big branch at a Derry meeting attended by several hundred militants. The relevance of Eamonn McCann's Labour Party base has been reduced by the Northern Ireland Labour Party decision to seek liquidation into the British Labour Party.

The truth is that excluding the sub-British sectlets the only socialist grouping with whom the LWR could fuse to form a "regrouped Irish revolutionary movement" is the PD. At this point Matgamna resorts to a dishonest account of the tortuous efforts to promote unity among the revolutionary groups. It is a lie to suggest that the EC or any individual member has tried to obstruct moves towards unity or in any way to exclude the LWR from participation in the unified organisation. IT IS CDE. MATGAMNA'S OWN SUPPORTERS IN IRELAND - THE LWR WHO ARE OPPOSED TO UNITY. Cde. Paddy Healey made this clear once again in a recent visit to Britain. He regards the PD as the expression of the "Radical bourgeoisie" in the six counties.

On the other hand, cde. Farrell has told the EC that PD has no objection to talking unity with the LWR or any socialist group in Ireland. He points out that so far the LWR have done nothing to mount action in support of PD or in any way to indicate solidarity of a desire, even, for joint work. The 'Trotskyist' tendency resolution on Ireland proposes not fusion with PD but the formation of a faction to enter PD. The 'Trotskyist' tendency and their Irish 'co-thinkers' must make clear whether they wish to fuse with PD or to split it. Let the 'Trotskyist' tendency convince their own supporters of the need to make "a real effort at unity".

To sum up, IS with its tiny resources was never able to more than marginally influence events in the north of Ireland. Its main duty was to try and influence the main body of militants moving to a socialist position. This influence would have been even less than it was if IS had adopted either a petty bourgeois and opportunist attitude on the national question (urging secession of Catholics) or a sectarian ultra left position on the troops. Our primary duty has been to help analyse the complex situation in Ireland, point to British capitalism's responsibility for it in Britain and in Ireland help those building a movement which will settle accounts with Westminster's Belfast and Dublin representatives. As cde. Matgamna rightly says none of the socialist groups are blameless. The LWR leadership (in spite of a number of dedicated comrades) is, to date, thoroughly sectarian. It is at the moment shopping around the various Fourth Internationals for recognition as THE Irish section; an arid task if ever there was one.

PD still has not fully evolved from its petty bourgeois origin. This is in spite of its recruitment of numbers of working class youth. A lack of seasoned and theoretically developed cadres is obvious. But because of its involvement in the struggle even now in the North, its relations with the left republicans, it stands a good chance of emerging as a serious revolutionary socialist current in Ireland.

NB: Unfortunately our copy has one or more pages missing at this point. If you have a copy or know where we could get one please let us know.

IS AND IRELAND: A CURT ANSWER TO A NON-REPLY

Dear comrades,

we find your 'reply' to our critique of your line on Ireland astonishing to say the least.

Our first difficulty is in taking it seriously! If it were the work of some enterprising, but dull comrades, in their own names, that might perhaps explain it. But this is the work of two of our brightest comrades, and published in your name! As a reply it is a tissue of evasions (the word "tedious" with which it is peppered is a marvellous escape hatch from the issues raised in our pamphlet) and serves only to show once more the weakness of your case; you merely restate your case, thus approaching the SLL's definition of a profound argument: saying things twice!

The second thing to note is the language, and the hysterical tone, resembling more the

language of a witch-hunt (and let's face it, since we joined IS in late '68 the treatment of the Trotskyist Tendency has seldom risen above the level of crude witch-hunting) than an attempt to arrive at the truth by argument. "Lies", "blatant dishonesty more worthy of the professional liars of the Workers' Press"; "slanders"; "factional bad faith"; "simple ignorance"; "Matgamna's rebellious Irish' satraps" etc. (What are satraps anyway? We thought they were Persian viceroys....) We do not complain: we merely note that our smooth comrades, who wear their "niceness" like a badge, resort here to the tone and language of the proverbial fishwife. To us it is proof that our attack drew blood. Good! Those responsible for the group's line on Ireland deserve to be made to feel their own responsibility.

The third thing to note is that the reply is largely an irrelevance according to its own terms of reference. You denounce violently the charge that in actual fact, according to the logic of actual politics, IS supported the troops, (and we never said IS explicitly supported them). Much ink, paper and spleen is spent in showing why and how it "would" be (it was?) quite principled to support the troops. If you are right that you didn't support them, why bother?

We will reply to your 'case' as briefly as possible. Time prevents a complete restatement of our case. We assume comrades have read the T.T. pamphlet, and recommend those who haven't to do so.

THE TROOPS

Briefly then, to repeat. For British imperialism the Northern 6 Cos. which were once the most profitable chunk of Ireland, are now the least profitable. Britain has to pay large sums of money (small compared with profits she reaps) in order to keep up the level of social services. The Orange statelet, once so valuable, has now become an embarrassment. Thus British capital wants a united 32 counties neo-colony. The reunification that Britain envisaged was a slow evolutionary process, gradually giving reforms to the Catholic minority who would be safely under the leadership of the Catholic middle class - while trying to stifle the Orange backlash, making sure that the Orange industrialists who also want reunification don't lose the leadership of the Protestant working class to the Paisleyites.

It didn't work out like that. The puppet government of Stormont didn't quench the Catholics thirst for reforms; they didn't control the Orange reaction. There was an eruption and British imperialism had to do the job itself. Its agents were the troops.

The role of the troops was not just to return the situation to the status quo, they had to create a new superstructure for the future rule of imperialism. They had to immediately prevent the breakup of the 6 Cos., but also to prepare for future unification with the 26Cos. They had to take away the newly won independence of the Catholic workers, and put them back under the hegemony of the Catholic middle class and the church. They had to smother or smash the Orange reaction. This could and did involve attacking the Paisleyites. It could, and may very well in the future, involve physically attacking the Catholic workers. It could and did involve politically and therefore militarily disarming the autonomous Catholic areas in Belfast and Derry.

Of all this Marks and Palmer see only the physical attacks on the Paisleyites. They do not see the less obvious but no less real political attack on the Catholic workers. However, let us by a hypothetical argument make things more clear for you. SW was demanding that the barricades in Belfast and Derry should stay up until certain demands were met – a slogan which we said was in obvious contradiction to the presence of the troops. Now suppose that the Catholics, following SW's advice, had refused to take their barricades down? Suppose that the troops had been unsuccessful in their efforts at persuading the Catholics to give up their autonomy – then undoubtedly they would have used force. Therefore at one and the same time they would be clobbering both the Paisleyites and the Catholics. Presumably then we would have to change our slogans according to a very rapidly changing reality.

The point is precisely that one bases one's programme, one's agitation and propaganda not on a one-sided interpretation of the role of the troops but on their overall role, not on their apparent role (defending Catholics from Paisleyites) but on their real role (making sure that the Catholics didn't defend themselves). If we don't do so, we are merely reflecting the existing level of understanding; we are standing objectively on the side of the Catholic middle class, who formed an alliance with imperialism against those who were calling for the withdrawal of British troops. Of course they were a small minority, but they were the most conscious, most progressive elements in the struggle and we should have been reinforcing their hostility to the troops and supporting them in their demands. Incidentally, the republicans are a very amorphous group. In Derry where the

young republicans are the most progressive section, they were calling for the withdrawal of the troops. As for the SLL and RSL sectlets in the 6 counties, we agree entirely that they did nothing to campaign around the demand. Following the lead of their mentors in London, they had a totally abstract concept of class unity which verged on denying that there was any religious friction at all. We think it is false to judge the demand for the withdrawal of the troops by looking at the performance of these nit-wits.

You are, comrades, still, it seems, in the panic which prompted you to abandon the call for the withdrawal of imperialist troops last August: "We should not forget that even today the Paisleyites/UVF force probably have more men at their disposal, under arms or with access to them, in N.I. than either the Catholics or the British army." The implication is that British imperialism is so weak that it needs our help - thus an oblique justification is offered for the analogy you make with Trotsky's approval for giving working class support to liberal bourgeois forces against reaction, all the better later to deal with the liberals. Therefore the troops must stay... But in that case should IS not call for more troops in order to ensure the better security of life and limbs of the Catholics and PD?

You quote Trotsky to back up your case. We think that you would have done your own cause better not to bother. Quoting Trotsky can be dangerous, comrades! Briefly, Trotsky argues that it might be in the workers' interests to fight side by side with 'democratic' bourgeois forces, including the army, against the fascists and backward-going forces - with the revolutionary workers "maintaining their complete political independence". Right!

Now during last Autumn, IS may have preserved what was left of its virginity by saying in the small print of SW 'no confidence' in the troops. But that is not the issue; nor does it fulfil the conditions stressed by Trotsky. That condition is independence of the masses involved, i.e. the Catholic workers. Did the Catholic workers maintain their independence? No, they did not. IS did, but it approaches sectarian ego-centrism to forget that the masses in N.I did not; and to ignore our own possibilities here. (Which is the issue between the T,T and the comrades of the EC). What could IS have done to reinforce and fight for the independence of the Catholic masses? By at least warning of the contradiction between the troops and self-defence, between the troops and free areas, between troops and the barricades. While this contradiction was working itself out in real life, in the political surrender of the barricades and of self-reliance of the masses to

the British army, IS was relegating it to the far-distant future.

The article you quote from SW is from October, and the renewed period of Protestant which the troops easily controlled. In the earlier crucial period when the barricades were first coming down in Derry and Belfast, SW didn't call for the defence of the barricades in any immediate sense. Why? To do so necessarily implied to call for resistance to the troops.

Your own quote from Trotsky on the hypothetical relations of a revolutionary Belgium and the attitude of the French working class in exploiting the contradictions between Germany and France to aid Belgium, is the best answer to you on this. The hypothetical case is of the sending of arms to Belgium by the French bourgeois state. In that case, the French workers would aid the French bourgeoisie. Yes.

But what is French imperialist 'aid' to a proletarian Belgium were not the sending of arms, but (using superior military strength) the substituting of their own army and their own action for Belgian proletarian self-reliance, in a drive to take physical control which they would then use as they liked? That's the real analogy with N.I. The British government didn't send guns (we wouldn't have the least objection to that...); it took control in its own interest. In such a case the French proletariat would oppose such 'aid' (i.e. such strangulation) to proletarian Belgium. And anybody who would argue otherwise, for the need to save, physically, Belgium and Belgian labour movement from the Nazis – who would annihilate the labour movement – would be a charlatan. In fact such people were called social patriots, they capitulated to the liberal bourgeoisie, pretending, as did the CPs, that they were utilising contradictions amongst the class enemy to further their own ends.

In most of the cases mentioned in these quotes, there is a weak and vacillating liberal bourgeoisie threatened by a considerable and powerful militarist or fascist reactionary force, with a strong section of the bourgeoisie lined up behind them. This is not the case in Ireland. The Paisleyites have no section of the bourgeoisie behind them (except those that take their ideology more seriously than their purses). The only conjuncture in which the bourgeoisie could line up behind the Paisleyites is the imminence of a proletarian revolution, which means by definition that the Protestant workers are not behind Paisley. That is why we must be careful when we call them fascists. To suggest, as do Marks and

Palmer, that the Paisleyites are the strongest force in the set up, is ludicrous nonsense. British imperialism is militarily, politically and economically the master of the situation. Look at the ease with which, in a few weeks, they had the whole situation under their control.

We repeat, comrades: quoting Trotsky is dangerous. Call yourselves Trotskyists if you like. Call us the "Trotskyist" Tendency (quotation marks are cheap enough). But beware of calling Leon Trotsky to the witness stand. He only speaks against you.

But more. It was a matter of a neo-colonial military power being deployed in a sector of a semi-colony. But - "revolutionary socialists at that point had parallel interests with the British bourgeois state in wishing the defeat of Paisleyite mob power", say Palmer and Marks, adding an entirely new, revolutionary definition of imperialist interest. According to this cosy formula, British revolutionary socialists were allowed to side with British imperialism, to aid it by embellishing its work and defending its actions before the already too miseducated British workers. How much further from Leninism can one get?

Talk of Lenin uniting with the Provisional Government in July 1917 to fight Kornilov is no more useful for your purpose of self-justification? Mass independence was preserved and grew. Lenin did not bow to the Provisional Government for fear of the physical effects of a Kornilov victory on the workers. The Bolsheviks did not allow the Provisional Government grasp on the situation to tighten. On the contrary - their support for Kerensky was indeed that of a rope for the hanged man. In Ireland IS objectively supported the complete subordination of the mass Catholic movement to the British government and its agents. There is no comparison.

Nor is it comparable with Trotsky's attitude to the Black/Red referendum in Prussia in 1931. Trotsky condemned CP/Nazi unity against the social democratic government and argued for a united working class front against the bourgeoisie and first of all the fascists. The GPs never heeded the call for a working class united front. Soon after the victory of the fascists, they went in, in panic, not for a United Front but Popular Fronts. What were these? The subordination of the workers and their parties to the 'liberal' bourgeoisie as the 'lesser evil'. Spain is the most extreme example. Marks and Palmer are indignant at any comparison of the CP then and IS & Ireland. "In Spain the stalinists

argued for the parallel interest of the liberal bourgeoisie and the workers in the defeat of fascism, to demanding the subordination and indeed the liquidation of all independent centres of working class power politically, militarily and industrially to the bourgeoisie, their army and state." Which is precisely what IS did in N.I. - in practice. Not accidentally Marks and Palmer do not bother to talk about how Trotsky would have fought against this subordination. Trotsky saw that keeping the political independence of the workers meant voting against the military budget in the Cortes. This is addressed, of course, not to the Cortes but as a slogan to the masses, - "No confidence in the bourgeoisie!". If IS had an MP would we have instructed him to vote against the British expedition in N.I.? We certainly hope so. But then would not this be in contradiction to refusing to call for the withdrawal of the troops?

There is of course a difference between the stalinists in Spain and IS in N.I., and subjectively not a small one, in that IS didn't demand the subordination and didn't want it. But you were so panic-stricken, comrades, so lacking in confidence and in perspective, that you did nothing to prevent it. In actual political logic you stumbled into popular frontism (as did the POUM in Spain 1936-37). When Marks and Palmer talk about parallel interests with imperialism (though they don't actually call it imperialism) they underline the grotesque misuse you make of Trotsky's quotes on the question, and especially the one on Prussia in 1931.

But in any case it is nonsense to just say that IS "called for no confidence or no concessions to the troops" without recalling that IS openly attacked those who opposed the presence of troops. Marks in SW openly argued that the troops were essential to the arming of the Catholics and their physical safety. That was spreading illusions – whatever the reservations in the small print. Of course IS did “argue against demobilisation, politically or militarily” (except at the crucial moment in September when to do so would have called for resistance to the British troops).

BREATHING SPACE

"The left wing in the Catholic working class have used the period since to strengthen their ability to defend themselves. PD also have used the months to try and develop their base, both organisationally and politically. Neither would have been possible under conditions of a religious civil war between Catholics and Protestants." - Incredible! The

barricades have been dismantled by the troops, the Catholic workers are firmly under the leadership of the middle class, they have lost their self-reliance and independence - and yet, they are better prepared to defend themselves.... Truly all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds! And what is the substantiation for this amazing assertion - that a few more guns have been imported and PD has begun to get itself organised (which we think it would have been better advised to do before the fire and not during it). Well, PD may be better prepared, but are the Catholic workers? No they are not.

SECESSION

To compare the demand of the Trotskyist Tendency on secession in N.I. with a demand for secession of Arab areas in Israel is, frankly, in bad faith. The comrades hope it will pass because the reference is so obscure. Briefly the Israeli secession demand (a left Zionist demand) would have strengthened the Zionists, with the seceded areas under the hegemony of Israel (not long ago there was talk of a similar state for the West Bank). Secession in N.I. would have rendered the Orange state unviable, made its continued existence outside a united Ireland (where it might have some sort of autonomy) impossible. That is how we saw it. Have any Orange elements ever raised this demand? Again the analogy doesn't stand.

You distinguish between the right of self determination and advocacy of it. In general true; but for Ireland it won't do. Yet again you show that you see the 6 cos. as a unit, a nation; and not Ireland a unit, the nation, with the 6 Cos. torn out by imperialist violence. British socialists don't raise the self determination demand; the Irish people, in their vast majority, have. For centuries. In the 6 Cos. itself the Catholic nationalist vote has at least this vestigial republican content.

Secession is denounced as a "stages theory". It is. It begins with reality, trying to give a republican logic to the actual catholic struggle. "Stages theory" has emotive connotations - mensheviks and stalinists. The difference? The mensheviks and stalinists imposed preconceived stages theories on realities where other and better possibilities existed. This was its reactionary character. But there are stages in reality based on real possibilities. Stages can be bridges, or they can be road blocks. Lenin, in most of his writings, understood this (and Marks and Palmer, e.g. in their 'reply', put forward a stagist theory on the civil rights movement, a reactionary one at that! And yet another

reactionary stagist theory is the breathing space argument.....) In relation to N.I. we said precisely what the alternatives have been shown to be. Either British consolidation - or a break up along republican lines. Stages? Yes. And the present stage is what? British entrenchment and massive intensification of catholic/protestant hostilities. True, the secession demand accepted unity as possible only in the future: this is realistic (short of a workers' revolution in Britain or Europe) IS's line has had no other effect. Palmer and Marks: in other words they look to other factors than the struggle of the class to save them from a situation which they can see no way to alter". Terrible! The point, comrades, is that we are dealing with a working class chronically divided over many decades with the division institutionalised in a state structure that is artificial to a rare degree. The talk of immediate class unity in action is idiotic phrase-mongering, nice to think of but day-dreaming. If IS had followed the logic of this we would have had a line very similar to the SLL and the RSL.

We proposed the strategy grounded in the recognition of the unsolved national question in Ireland and of its position at the root of working class division.

We did not accuse those who mentioned the agonising problem of Belfast as a democratic quibble, of saying that the border was the best of all possible borders. We said it of those who refused to consider the logic of the map showing that the areas west of the Bann (half of N.I.) had a Catholic majority - because these areas are mainly agricultural and not heavily populated.

We are criticised for withdrawing the emergency secession demand (suggested pre-August precisely for the situation of pogroms etc.) We saw it not as an all-time panacea. The situation has changed: Self-determination remains a principled basic slogan; one interpretation of how to achieve it, contingent on a certain situation, no longer applies. Marks and Palmer: "Whatever became of their insistence on the question of demands that 'the content and meaning does not differ according to whether action might be on a mass scale or on a tiny scale'?" What we said was that there cannot be an internal contradiction between propaganda and agitation depending on the likely immediate effects: remember Marks at the time arguing that we could tacitly accept troops in our 'agitation' and reject them in our 'propaganda', because propaganda wouldn't lead to action. Does that mean that a programmatic concept (and its components theory, propaganda and agitation) is forever fixed, unalterable, that there are no contingency responses?

We retreated from one interpretation of the basic point (self determination) as not immediately applicable. You equate this with the IS retreat from the basic point itself; in this case self-reliance, no subordination to imperialism. The existing situation cannot dictate demands (slogans) contradicting our strategy: but not all strategies are at all times appropriate, or immediately relevant. The strategy of the break-up of the state is not applicable when the upsurge has died down. Moreover: there was a massive contradiction between accepting the troops and believing in working class independence. The difference is that the secession slogan was dropped when it could no longer be applied; but IS dropped the troops slogan just when it did become crucial.

AGITATION AND PROPAGANDA

For our own part, were we "as tedious as a king" we think that we could find it in our hearts to bestow it all upon comrades Marks and Palmer, for they obviously have not bothered to reply to this very boring argument.

To restate the original case. In his article *Fine Slogans and Grim Reality* (SW 18.9.69) Comrade Marks identifies agitation (slogans) with calls to action, and propaganda (small print) with education. This is the mistake Martynov made in "rendering Plekhanov more profound". Lenin showed that agitation and propaganda are both educational and could both lead to action, and that they both came from a common source - our programme and analysis of reality. Martynov made this artificial distinction between agitation and propaganda because he wanted to be a Marxist in "discussion and propaganda" but not in his "calls to action".

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

If it was sectarian to say that the troops were not there with parallel interests to the Catholic workers, but to attack them (and not in the distant future but here and now,

even if not physically) and crystallise this with the slogan British Troops Out - then we plead guilty. But who was it who ignored reality? In his article Marks talked about "a future turn in the situation when the demolition of the barricades may be needed in the interests of British capital itself". Now according to his logic, when the troops did start taking down the barricades (that very same week) then the first stage - troops +- Catholics v. Paisleyites - had finished. Shouldn't IS then have re-incorporated the demand for troops to go?

SOUTHERN FACTORIES

Perhaps Sean Matgamna discussed the possibly chauvinist overtones of the demand for seizure of southern factories last Autumn. It is not true to say he opposed it. The LWR has actually succeeded in interesting workers in Dublin (in a car assembly plant) in the idea. In their reply the comrades give a prominence to the demand that was absent last Autumn.

In any case, while good, its limitations must be seen. It can hardly be a major response or strategy at this stage. It presupposes a really advanced level of consciousness in the south. Any seizures would in fact probably be the work of republicans. To equate the seizure with working class politics in anticipation is highly optimistic, as is also to think that it could, without an actual revolution of the working class in the South (and this can be evoked just by Catholic solidarity?!!) lead to a successful class call to the Paisleyites. Do the comrades think factories seizures in the south would lead to clearer class struggles in the North? Alas it is not so simple. It would probably have as exacerbating an effect on inter-working class relations in the north as the secession demand. 'When a good idea is raised to a great panacea one descends once more to fantasies.

ICRSC

We are accused of not building ICRSC - and by implication of not being active on the Irish question in Britain. Over a year ago one of the biggest solidarity demonstrations was organised by us in Manchester (see SW report), and a campaign was set up. Last August and September we organised meetings and demonstrations (extensively reported in the Guardian – or doesn't Cde Palmer read it?). Manchester No.1 branch sent two

volunteers to Belfast when it seemed that a conflict between troops and Catholics was developing on the barricades issue. Lack of interest? Of activity? True, we were distrustful of the ICRSC and its many shifts and turns. True also, in many of our leaflets, we turned a left face to the Irish workers, raised the workers' republic demand and specific solidarity with the. left in N.I. with the Irish workers we approached.

It is implied that Sean Matgamna believed a solidarity movement should be based only on a full socialist programme! Nonsense. We did believe in the need to turn to the Irish workers in Britain with socialist propaganda on the basis of solidarity with the left in Ireland. Palmer and Marks argue that in the early stages of civil rights it was necessary "to support all the genuinely anti-Unionist forces" - i.e. even the Green Tories. With the concessions after August these moved out and civil rights reached its second stage, a socialist or at least social emphasis. Socialists should have concentrated on solidarity with the left while not excluding general solidarity. NICRA was already doing what ICRSC did. The final joke was PD's repudiation of ICRSC. The story of ICRSC is one of tailing after the liberal bourgeois demands in Ireland followed by panic switching of slogans, and by decline. The defence is just as ludicrous.

P.D. AND THE L.W.R.

To say we lie about the EC or individuals in it opposing left unity in Ireland is useless. We can quote NC resolutions. When Marks and Palmer wrote that the LWR opposes unity they had in their possession a letter from the LWR secretary agreeing to the unity conference proposed last December by the IS NC and then dropped!

In general LWR and PD relations are very bad. The LWR finds it difficult to forgive the antics of PD's leaders in calling for British troops: they tend to make the mistake of confusing the raw mass movement of PD with those leaders whom they know and distrust. Their attitude is reinforced by, for example, PD selling Maoist literature at its conference (including such works as In Defence of Stalin) while barring the Dublin Trotskyists' fortnightly paper Workers' Republic. Marxists in Britain should help overcome the animosities, recognising the need for a new Marxist organisation, whilst seeing ED for what it is - a raw and amorphous group. As for the "touchstone" for unity in Ireland being Gillespie's paper - who decides? - it should have been decided at the conference which the IS NC proposed last December (which Palmer thereafter worked

against). Instead it is sprung" on the left as a factional manoeuvre in a way best calculated to alienate the LWR. However, we think that the LWR should participate.

To sum up, comrades. We have followed in the tracks of your appointed attorneys, picking up their political litter. We missed out on some silly bits, like where they say we believe IS consciously obstructed the growth of a revolutionary socialist movement in Ireland! Indeed, we emphasise your good intentions. But good intentions are not enough - principled politics are far better.

Yours fraternally,

Sean Matgamna

Rachel Matgamna

Joe Wright