

Where the Hillside Men Have Sown: 40 years of the IRA

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An article from "Workers Republic" no.17, Feb. 1967 about what attitude revolutionary socialists should take to the IRA and Sinn Fein

"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 agree upon no single principle, except upon 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, on the other hand, 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 of all our efforts. ... Every revolutionary effort in Ireland has drawn the bulk of its adherents from the ranks of the 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, turned to thoughts of physical force as a means of attaining their ends. *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.*" (Second emphasis added)

James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*. Pp53/54. From Workers' Republic, July 1899

Partition, coupled with bourgeois stagnation for 40 years, has kept the 'physical force' men in business and Sinn Fein has substituted for a "revolutionary left" for half a century now, during the National upsurge and afterwards. If the bourgeois domination of Republicanism in the 1916/21 period, and the absence within it of a conscious working class force armed with a clear programme of struggle for a republic of the working people, led to its collapse in 1922, the situation resulting from that collapse gave an unprecedented boost to the modern version of the old Physical force movement.

Any revolutionary socialist organisation in Ireland must make clear its position on traditional Republicanism. This is of course the anniversary of the last guerilla campaign, and a good opportunity to examine not only the details of that campaign but also the background to recent developments in Sinn Fein, including its adoption of a slight "socialist" tinge.

Since the Civil War the pattern traced by Connolly has been

moving in reverse, in the form of waves of physical force men towards constitutional normality. It is a pattern of zig-zags between attempts at constitutional activity, and weak guerilla sorties, these organically linked together by periods of sterile inactivity in both spheres. It oscillates from boycotting and isolated, unsupported, guerilla tactics, to 'opportunism'. The logic of boycotting/terror tactics by a small minority induces feelings of impotence that generate new upsurges of bourgeois opportunism - which, being but the other side of the one coin, leads in its frustration back to a new round of pseudo-revolutionary sterility and posturing, futile despite the very real sacrifices of IRA activists. Usually the legalist swing takes the form of a split-off - Fianna Fail, Clann na Poblachta ... and now once more a section of Sinn Fein seems ready to follow the tracks of its elder brothers along the high road of normal bourgeois politics! A new abortion is about to be delivered, and few will be surprised - since the end of the last guerilla campaign this has been very much on the cards, in accordance with the familiar swing of the pendulum.

1. Round One – Fianna Fail

After the Civil War, ending as it did with only the embryonic CP attempting to develop a revolutionary workers movement, and the exploratory steps of Mellows and his comrades towards proletarian socialism obliterated by the Free State executioners, the Sinn Fein rump remained as the main opposition to the Free State establishment. The pathological self-effacement of its official leaders made Labour a negligible quantity; and the mass demoralisation of that time of disappointment and defeat bred inertia, entrenching them in their positions and making a quick development of influence for the tiny ICP impossible.

The anti-Treatyites, boycotting the Free State parliament, retained the support of large areas of Ireland, particularly in the South and West, which the Free State government had had to conquer from the sea like a foreign territory. Politically Sinn Fein remained fixed in the attitude of official National Unity Against Imperialism, resting its claims on the elections to the Second Dail. Cutting itself off from the road of Mellows, it was impotent.

Then, in the mid-twenties, the first of the characteristic breakaways occurred, that of Fianna Fail. At the end of 1925 the Convention of the IRA withdrew recognition from De Valera's rump Second Dail (the 'Republican Government'), constituting itself as the supreme authority for the allegedly extant Irish Republic. The IRA became an exclusively military organisation. Fianna Fail was founded in May 1926, De Valera having finally split from Sinn Fein on the issue utilising Free State legality. He took most of the old anti-Treaty forces with him: the rump of Sinn Fein did not even contest the September 1927. On August 10th 1927 De Valera entered the Dail, and hard line Sinn Fein had lost its major forces.

The evolution of Fianna Fail is not unknown: adroitly using the question of the Annuities it was by 1932 the main parliamentary party, soon emerging as the major conservative force in Ireland. For 35 years now, the former uncompromising Republicans, the physical force men of 1922, have provided a military garrison for one side of the partition which the split Irish bourgeoisie and British Imperialism have erected in Ireland. Never slow to preach love of Ireland and demand loyalty "to the nation", and thus subordinate the workers to themselves, they actively assist in maintaining the present division of the country.

Was it not a remarkable evolution? From the most violent "revolutionism" to ally determined quietism, both socially and in relation to Imperialism. There was no great purge to which one can point as the change-over. How [to] explain it? Current Sinn

Fein supporters will say: "They betrayed". But did they not merely act according to the nature of their political species? We will find the evidence on which to judge the issue in the subsequent history of the rump IRA which did not join Fianna Fail in its evolution.

Recognising neither of the two statelets, the IRA continued through the later twenties as an army recruited on one issue to the exclusion of all others, and seeing the national question as the ONE BIG SOLUTION to all ills. The rump Sinn Fein leadership let Fianna Fail take the lead in the land annuities campaign – no mean achievement considering that one of the leaders of the IRA, Peadar O'Donnell, was the unofficial originator of that movement. This was a period of the most pure physical forcism; as now they absorbed energy from real social tension struggles, but directed it into the ground in the manner of a lightning conductor. In this period the IRA had between 15,000 and 20,000 members left.

Looking back 40 years we see the zig-zag pattern: but there was of course the alternative possibility, the emergence of a revolutionary workers movement which could have pushed Sinn Fein aside, absorbing the rank and file working-farmer and proletarian members. These are the real victims, befuddled by the bourgeois ideology of the sterile, exclusively nationalist movement, prevented from arriving at a genuine revolutionism. *Why did a revolutionary workers' party fail to emerge?*

Failure of the alternatives

Naturally the big pole of attraction for leftward moving elements at this period was the Irish section of the Third International, the Irish Workers League. But already this organisation was in decline as a revolutionary force. At the end of the twenties it took the absurdly 'left' positions of Stalin's "Third Period", which declared Social Democrats etc. to be fascists and led to the complete isolation of the Communist Parties, and the liquidation of their influence in the broader labour movement. In Germany this led to blindness towards the Nazis, who were come to power without a fight, despite the great, but unused, strength of the CP; in Britain a position of influence with the Trade Unions and the Labour Party was wiped out in the wave of blind sectarian mania.

All this, weakening the revolutionary working class in Europe, also weakened it in Ireland. As elsewhere, it led to a strengthening of the right-wing labour opportunists, and above all weakened the power of the Party to grow and attract potential revolutionaries.

When this attack of madness was over, the Comintern passed through a brief watershed period before emerging at the Seventh, and last, Congress in 1935 as an explicitly opportunist, anti-revolutionary organisation, concerned not with consolidating the proletariat as a revolutionary force to fight imperialism, but more with using oppositivist forces as pawns in the game of alliances being played by the Russian bureaucrats with some capitalist power. By the mid-thirties when this trend had clearly emerged the Stalinists had a growing influence on leftward moving elements of the IRA - but now it took its place as another blind alley, side by side with the Fianna Fail trend and the pure and simple physical force men. But though it was incapable of being a serious revolutionary alternative, it was still all too capable of disruption.

In this period of the Great Depression and general political ferment, when Fianna Fail was showing itself up, there was an intense striving by the rank and file towards a more consistently social revolutionary stand. That could still only be a communist stand. Despite everything the Stalinist party had a growing influence, and not only in the 1934 Republican Congress. 200

Irish Volunteers, mostly IRA, formed the "James Connolly" Section and went to fight for the Spanish Republic, recognising a common struggle. The Spanish events would have transformed the outlook for the workers of Europe and the world, had the Spanish workers been allowed to consolidate the power they had won. But it was here that the CPs delivered the goods to the capitalists - hoping in Stalin's name to persuade them that they didn't need fascists to control the workers. The Popular Front disarmed the Spanish workers and turned victory into defeat. This had a depressing effect on the workers of all Europe, including Ireland. A proletarian victory in Spain would have shown the way forward to the many Irish sympathisers attracted by that struggle. Clearly it had an attractive power for the best activists remaining in the IRA, who would have made an incomparable revolutionary core for a proletarian party.

Meanwhile in Ireland the CPI moved decisively to the right, towards illusions in Fianna Fail, and began to lose the ability to appeal to genuine revolutionaries. As early as the 1935 Comintern Congress Sean Murray admitted a tendency to tail after Fianna Fail. But this was the Congress which institutionalised that sort of abandonment of a revolutionary perspective throughout the world – and Murray's "self-criticism" was in fact not a signal for a return to Bolshevism but a prelude to open illusions in Fianna Fail. By the late thirties it had lost both the desire and the ability to lead IRA sympathisers forward from Sinn Fein conceptions to proletarian internationalism. Adopting the line of least resistance, it cynically donned the garb of the most narrow nationalism, accommodating to the existing conceptions of the IRA, when the task was so clearly to change and deepen that consciousness of society initially expressed in nationalism. The CPI was to continue long enough as a force to play the recruiting sergeant's drums in 1941 in the interests of the British Empire.

Thus thirties, which could have seen the emergence of a genuinely revolutionary alternative, on an independent base, to physical forcists and bourgeois opportunists alike, passed with nothing gained, despite the rank and file's constant spontaneous striving towards a new orientation. The decade had opened ominously with the Stalinist "Third Period" mania, passed through the betrayal of the German, Spanish and French workers, and ended with the Hitler/Stalin pact and the Imperialist World War.

The modern physical force movement had continued, impotent and frozen in the grip of sterile bourgeois nationalism, yet alive and sometimes capable of growing not so much by its own dynamism as by the weakness of its substitutes. Sections of the IRA, starting out from abstract republicanism, had been drawn towards the left to seek a base in the working class - and they had been disappointed and betrayed by the Stalinist corruption. Not only were the IRA groups which turned leftward disorientated, but a flow of recruits from the new generations was assured the IRA by the utter failure of an independent revolutionary workers party to develop on its own axis: the labour movement in all these decades has been left to the worst reformists, as has the whole Irish working class been left to stew in the peculiarities of its own conditions, unaided by the success of the European workers in countries where victory was more than possible.

2. The 1939 campaign and after

With the consolidation of Fianna Fail and the failure of the revolutionary socialist alternative to establish itself, the pendulum swung back again towards an unsupported and unprepared guerilla campaign, from 1939 onwards. *The pattern has firmly established itself.*

A foredoomed ultimatum to the British Government in January 1939 led to bombing campaign in England. Opposition to this policy within the IRA seems to have centred on those who had a perspective of using the British difficulties not to strike at British Imperialism - but simply to declare a 26 Co. Republic as a face-saving prelude to lining up loyally in the "anti-fascist" camp. This was of course, the Stalinist line; it is a measure of how low they had sunk and how far they had travelled from even the remote possibility of providing a genuinely revolutionary alternative to the aloof and mystical petit-bourgeois leadership headed now by Russell. In their propaganda for the "democracies" the Stalinists ignored the fact that the monstrous and "fascist" side of France and Britain was exported overseas to places like India and Indo-China. The IRA was naturally not so forgetful, and indeed few Irishmen could easily achieve the mental association of the "democratic anti-fascists" with the British Empire. This policy was bound to be a non-starter.

How not to fight imperialism

And so the IRA's hand of retribution fell on England ... but it was a light hand by any standards. The plan was to strike at power centres etc. but the congenital inefficiency of the organisation, aggravated by the harrying of the Fianna Fail government, reduced any effectiveness it might have had. In modern wars resources and productivity are decisive. The only way to beat a superior military technique is to disrupt it from within. For proletarian revolutionaries this means extending the class call into the enemy's camp: with this weapon the Bolsheviks succeeded in defeating vastly superior military forces. But the IRA's outlook excluded this, and, reduced to a confrontation of military technique, the campaign was ludicrously ineffective. By its 'nation against nation' approach it helped to alienate the only potentially decisive ally which could have been called in to tip the balance against the British ruling class; and the Imperialist propagandists were provided with ample material to feed British nationalism.

We are not preaching a naive propaganda appeal to the British working class, which has still to clearly separate its own identity from that of its rulers (a confusion sanctified by nationalism). What was needed was to prepare links with the advanced elements in the British labour movement, but this could only have been done by a workers' party in Ireland. The IRA instead aided the Imperialists to present the case to the British workers in the worst light (though a number of unfortunate accidents in the campaign also contributed). The British workers sabotaged the intervention by British troops in Bolshevik Russia. It could - were its class interests involved - have thrown aside nationalism and come to the aid of the Irish workers too.

The issue of bombing in England is not one of principle. All sections of all nations have a right to wage war on their oppressors. Here it is a question of appraising for their effectiveness the methods which its outlook led the IRA to adopt. The results of the 'invasion' bear out our contention that it was the least efficient way to achieve the desired end. On the issue of principle suffice it to point out that the British Trotskyists at that time, when British chauvinism was at its height both before and during the war, openly defended the right of the IRA to fight the Empire. They also defended the IRA victims of Imperialism at a time when "His Majesty's Communist Party" supported the hanging of republicans. But at the same time they pointed to what was wrong with the tactics and conceptions of the IRA and advocated the Bolshevik programme as an alternative. (As did the Irish Trotskyists who had some following in the Dublin Fiann Eireann in the 1939/41 period).

Likewise the question of working with the Germans was in principle no better and no worse than working with any other

Imperialism. But the "Foreign policy" of the IRA was blind because they could see only British Imperialism. The victory of either imperialist camp held a grim future in store for Ireland's workers, who stood to gain from neither the modern King nor the modern Kaiser - only the victory of the working class could offer a real way out: but the IRA was entirely unable to prepare for this. Hence the history of the IRA in that period is also one of blunders and tragic waste. Any Irish Republic set up under the tutelage the German Empire would have been, at the very best, no better than a 'Republic' under the British and the bourgeoisie - and other possibilities also existed.

While denouncing both Imperialist camps we need not ignore the more degenerate form of capitalist barbarism represented by the Nazis. For the working class - or small nations - it is not necessarily true that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. In this case it certainly was not true. But the Russell's world outlook was too narrow for issues more complicated than 'for or against Britain'. In principle, the IRA had every right to gain any advantages from England's enemies. But only the most blinkered bourgeois republicans, playing with abstractions, could have expected gains from the German Empire. A victorious Germany would have played England's role in Ireland. The only road for revolutionaries was that of the workers' revolution against world Imperialism - and the IRA was unaware of that road's existence.

Round Two: Clann Na Poblachta

The inevitable pattern reasserted itself: - we now reach the tale of the open emergence of the physical force men of 1939 as a Fianna Fail-type ordinary bourgeois party. They follow the physical force men of 1922 who had travelled the same road in the late twenties, the second big wave to go over the top, shedding the benefit of physical force camouflage, into the fire of open bourgeois politics.

Thwarted in its drive against Britain; suppressed by Fianna Fail with totalitarian thoroughness; feeling its own impotence like a great stone on its back, the movement splintered internally, producing savage fights, bitter recriminations and an internal civil war. The new Fianna Fail which emerged from the chaos was Clann Na Poblachta, formed from a combination of disillusioned IRA members and partially repentant Fianna Fail, and led by Sean MacBride. With a programme of formal Republicanism and verbal radicalism, it grew after 1945, rising on a wave of disillusionment with Fianna Fail. (In its decline it was to throw that support back to Fianna Fail). It benefited also from the vacuum in effective revolutionary politics and a split in the Labour Party.

MacBride's group had earlier been connected with Saor Eire, banned at the beginning of the thirties as "communistic". We must remember this fact if we are to the lesson that vagueness and a platonic calling out of Connolly's name is not enough: this is becoming particularly important now, with the growing popular left phrases in Ireland.

In the post war crisis period Clann Na Poblachta won ten seats, and the balance in the Dail. How did this junior edition of Fianna Fail behave? It joined the strangest coalition of history, comprising the then two Labour parties, and the Free State ex-blueshirts of Fine Gael! The erstwhile pseudo revolutionaries emerged as a normal bourgeois party; their mask vanished overnight. Impotently confined within bourgeois society, they could not change either the economic relations with Imperialism or the political relationships - so they organised a change of name, declaring the Free State a Republic! Then, having created a brave new paper Republic, they proved just how nonsensical the change was when they balked at reform as mild as the Mother and Child scheme.

Dr. Noel Browne, the Clann Na Poblachta Minister of Health, presented a free-health plan to cover mothers, and children up to the age of 16. The medical profession objected, and the red-robed reverend neanderthallers insisted on a means test. The Cabinet split. And Clann Na Poblachta? MacBride in panic asked Browne to resign! Thus, with amazing speed, the new contender was exposed as a pale shadow of Fiann Fail. The coalition fell and Clann Na Poblachta declined very rapidly indeed.

Was this another Fianna Fail-type "betrayal"? Or had they both acted according to their very nature? Increasingly, the whole series of developments, including the current constitutionalisation move, is best explained by the picture Connolly drew 70 years ago. When they descend from the hills, the bourgeois character of the abstract republicanism is quickly made visible.

3.

With the decline of Clann Na Poblachta the circular spin continued: back to physical force. By now the revolutionary socialist alternative didn't get a look in. At the beginning of the 1950s the IRA began to take on flesh again. A groundswell of recruits soon passed the 1,000 mark. The United Irishman was founded. A split on tactics and degrees of militancy led to the growth of a minority, more militant group side by side with the IRA/Sinn Fein - Saor Uladh, led by Liam Kelly. Allied to Saor Uladh was the Chrystal section of the IRA. The resulting campaign, the last, then continued officially until 1962. 300 men engaged actively in the fighting; 7 RUC died, 36 were wounded; £3-4m damage was done.

The United Irishman on the 1956 campaign: who need not be ashamed?

This last effort is discussed in the Dec. 1966 United Irishman. The editorial must be the most smug piece of self-accounting possible for even the most irresponsible leaders of any movement. It is not even honest. They demonstrate that theirs is the tradition of bluff and distortion of lessons that are vital for the future. They present a front of contentment, with everything in the best light for themselves; but in reality the picture was far from being so nice. It was a picture of blunders (as usual) mixed with viciousness towards those who struggled vainly against the incompetent leaders.

The articles in United Irishman are a compilation of lies, half truths and evasion. Saor Uladh is nowhere mentioned and the impression deliberately given that the IRA was alone in the field: but it was Saor Uladh which began the campaign independently with the burning of the 6 customs posts along the border on Armistice Day 1956 – more than a month before the 'official' campaign began. In the Role of Honour Aloysius Hand is listed, and the inference is that he was of the IRA ... but he was a member of Saor Uladh. During his political life he was slandered and ostracised by the IRA and Sinn Fein in Monaghan in the most viciously sectarian manner, by institutionalised leaders who feared for their own control. For years they ignored his death. And now they silently slot his name into their Role of Honour! But still not mention is made of his comrade Connie Green, killed in 1955. Why? Because they must preserve the fiction that there was no activity before their official campaign began in Dec. 1956. Even in tearful eulogies to their dead they tamper with the records, behaving like sordid bureaucrats!

They boast about the preparatory arms raid on Armagh barracks in June 1954, but do not mention that over half the participants had been expelled by 1956, and slandered as police spies and British agents (see United Irishman Oct. and Nov. 1956). The Omagh raid of Oct. 1954 is mentioned, but not to draw lessons

from the blind stupidity and disorganisation which marked it. A number of incidents will demonstrate the chaos and indifferent attitude of some of the leaders. When it was realised that the raid had failed, the order to retreat was given. A lorry waiting to move the men was ordered to leave, the driver on questioning this being told that alternative transport was in use. This was not the case, and the result was the abandonment of part of the Dublin Unit, many of whom were captured. Some ran the 10 miles to the border, and made their way to a rendezvous in Monaghan Town; and there they found the then Chief of Staff ... standing before a blazing fire with his overcoat pulled up at the rear, warming his backside! Two Dublin Volunteers had to be restrained from shooting him down. It was to reassert the authority of dedicated revolutionaries such as this man, in face of a mutiny by Co. Tyrone Republicans that Omagh was picked for the raid in the first place. There were far better targets. When the remnants of the Dublin Unit demanded an enquiry into the raid it was refused on the grounds that the officer in charge (who was in no way to blame for the fiasco) was in jail!

Again, United Irishman boasts about the raid at Arbourfield barracks, Berkshire in 1955. And again the subsequent expulsion of the bulk of those who took part is ignored. The Arbourfield raid shows the fantastic bureaucracy at work and explains the incompetence of the organisation in general: after the raid volunteers were faced with the greatest hue and cry there had been in England for a decade. Reaching many "safe" houses they had the doors slammed in their faces. The person given the job of arranging safe houses had been dismissed for reporting that not enough were available! The truth of the Arbourfield raid is the the bourgeois leadership needed it as a vote-getter in the second round of the 1955 Six-County elections.

Another item highlights the work of the Republican Publicity Bureau which, says United Irishman, "built up a reputation for integrity and truthfulness". In fact the RPB, the voice of the narrow sectarians who led the IRA, more than once aided the state against Saor Uladh. RPB disclaimers of Saor Uladh activities, in the name of "The Republican movement", played into the hands of the Special Branch. Once the RPB issued a statement disclaiming a 'job' Special Branch and the RUC knew who to look for. In 1957 when members of Dublin Saor Uladh were arrested and charged with armed robbery at an explosives dump, workers refused to identify them. Some days later the RPB denounced the raid, and the denunciation was used by the police to persuade the witnesses to identify those whom the police said were "Dublin gangsters" - Sean Geraghty and Joe Chrystal. Saor Uladh conveyed the truth to these workers just in time for them to retract their evidence.

The main article says that in 1958 the Cypriot EOKA made contact with the IRA, and joint plans to release Irish and Cypriot prisoners were laid, these being broken off when the Cypriot struggle ended and the EOKA prisoners were released. This is not quite the truth. In 1958 the more militant members of EOKA contacted the more militant Republicans - i.e. Nicky Samson contacted Joe Chrystal. The 'dialogue' did not end: the EOKA militants played their part in releasing Joseph Murphy from Wakefield jail in 1959. The only member of the 'official' movement involved was the prisoner -- and he too has now (1966) been expelled!

An Cumann Cabhrach is credited with the "Herculean labour" of caring for the prisoners' dependents. This is a lie. It is also a slander, because if An Cumann Cabhrach successfully cared for all prisoners' dependents, then those who formed the Irish Political Prisoners Fund must have been guilty of false pretences. Sinn Fein refused aid to the dependents of those who would not accept its discipline in jail. One man treated thus had

lost a leg in the ambush in which Aloysius Hand died. Still, at meeting after meeting in New York in 1958 Sinn Fein spokesmen gave assurances that no discrimination was being practised in the distribution of money ... False pretences?

No, it is not as pleasant a picture as they paint it in the United Irishman. And the putrefaction emerges more clearly still in view of the situation inside the Curragh Camp.

In the first year in the camp twelve men who between them had taken part in the Arbourfield raid, the first Roslea raid, the return to Armagh and the return to Omagh; two of whom had been continuously on the run from '55 to their internment in '57; five of whom had been members of the first Column to move North; all but two of whom had been involved in the opening shots of the Campaign (11.XI.56, not 12.XII.56) – these twelve were deliberately and systematically ostracised by the other prisoners on the orders of the Camp OC, Thomas MacCurtain. Any prisoner who associated with them was himself victimised. Clothing and foodstuffs sent in by sympathisers and intended for all were denied them, Why? Because the twelve refused the discipline of MacCurtain - who had been elected OC at a meeting to which they were refused admission! Only the official leaders' ability and willingness to cut off aid from the dependents of those who refused this discipline within the camp allowed them to impose this shamelessly sectarian regime on the other prisoners.

Sinn Fein's contradictions

The reason for this regime is clearly the contradictions within Sinn Fein and IRA. Itself bourgeois, it regards the Free State Republic and its Establishment as its own kith and kin, and therefore cracked down viciously on members who saw the habitually peaceful submission of cornered volunteers to the Free State police as illogical. These second rate bourgeois took on the job of waging a national war without either the Northern or Southern bourgeois rulers backing them; they at the same time undertook to keep the movement of small farmers' sons and workers, attracted to their banner, firmly within bourgeois conceptions. Thus arose the conflict and the internal bureaucracy. The leaders came into conflict with rank and filers who took seriously their propaganda about all-out national war against internal as well as external enemies of Republicanism, for on no account would they fight the internal enemies of Republicanism - the bourgeoisie. Above all, discussion of social questions was forbidden and many of the current Sinn Fein "socialists" were the most active in expelling volunteers they found discussing social questions.

Saor Uladh were more serious in their approach, rejecting much of the traditional out-[word illegible] of the 'hillside men'. They felt under no obligation to keep faith with an [word illegible] whose strength was superior force; tactically they recognised the courts; they rejected the official line that RUC and Dublin Special Branch should not be shot at. More important, they tended to face the [act, religiously denied by Sinn Fein and the IRA, that it is not merely a question of 'British occupied Ireland' but of the tie-[word illegible] of both sections of Irish capitalism, as the local garrison of Imperialism; and that it was a question of civil war against this garrison, on both sides of the border. Largely made up of workers, Saor Uladh became involved in Dublin unemployed struggles, helping to form unemployed defence groups in 1958. It also became involved in land agitation in Kerry. It tried to link up with the world movement against colonialism, thus departing from the traditional myopia of seeing only British imperialism, and had contact with the EOKA and the FLN. The tendency of Saor Uladh, striving to escape the contradictions of traditional Republicanism, is clear. But as a body it did not succeed in adopting a clear revolutionary

working class perspective. However, its conflicts with the IRA had the effect of starting a number of its worker members on the road to a Marxist class consciousness.

There is a further contradiction within Sinn Fein, and that is the discrepancy between its basically petit-bourgeois ideal and present-day reality. Despite its recent adoption of a slight 'socialist' coloration, its ideal is an image of small capitalism as it was 150 years ago, of small-island self-sufficiency. But when they find themselves in power, reality dominates and they quickly fall in with the prevailing forces of modern society; demonstrating that the petit-bourgeoisie, stratified and non-homogenous, cannot play an independent role today, they very soon emerge without their ideal as common-or-garden bourgeois social conservatives, merging with the top layers of society and dominating in their interests, the lower levels of the petit-bourgeoisie.

The absence of a serious social policy in Sinn Fein really amounts to acceptance of the status quo; by forbidding discussion of the question of class domination it aids the powers that do dominate in Irish society. In denying class conflict it tends to disguise its own class character: its inability, through a lack of proletarian policy, to heal the bourgeois/imperialist-fostered split in the class. Too often, in fact, the implication of such gross IRA simplifications as "British occupied Ireland" could lead to attempting to conquer by force the northern workers, a conception which is best calculated to perpetuate the division of the country. But what unity could there ever be on the basis of their mystical, utopian dreams of a return to small capitalism? The only unifying principle is the class one, following Larkin's example of 1907: but to take this road would mean, for these petit-bourgeois, committing suicide as a class. So they resort to their "wrap-the-green-flag-around-me" Republicanism, which alienates the northern workers.

The unity of the workers of all Ireland will never be achieved by people with a vestige left in their heads of the traditional Sinn Fein conceptions, the one threadbare idea of a mystical nationalism - nor on the basis of a spurious "national unity", i.e. class collaboration, tying the workers to the bourgeoisie. It will be accomplished by those who destroy the beloved "national unity" of the bourgeoisie - and of Sinn Fein - in favour of a worker/small farmer alliance within Ireland and above all of the international unity of all workers (against both Sinn Fein's 'little Ireland' and the bourgeoisie's economic and political alliances with other bourgeois nations which at the present time threaten to drive many more thousands off the land and into exile); it will take the form of a merciless, continuous campaign to split off and temper in all the fronts of the class struggle the truly revolutionary core of the proletarian class party, fusing it together and freeing it from all vacillators, all opportunists, all who would stop short of proletarian power. *Working-class* unity will be won, not in unity with the bourgeoisie but *against* that 'unity'.

4. The class, the party ... and its tactics.

Trotskyists, the present-day Leninists, habitually argue from the experience of modern history that the most heroic and magnificent spontaneous action by the masses, if not stiffened and organised with full class consciousness by a Bolshevik-type party, will be defeated. But a 'party' on its own, in virtual isolation from the class, conducting the struggle as a form of single combat with reaction, is an anti-Bolshevik caricature. In a sense this is at the root of many of the IRA's troubles in the last 40 years, in contrast to its more effective past. Cut off from the masses individual incompetence and accidents, though unavoidable in this kind of struggle, became cumulative and weighed the movement down. Whereas in a real mass movement the upward thrust from below, though not removing

the need for competent military leadership, compensates for the losses, inefficiencies, accidents, as it did in the 1916-21 period. Since then, with the proletariat as the explosive element - the only force which by its leadership is capable of transforming the many struggles of the working farmers from the hopeless death agony of a class that is being wiped out into a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist state and Imperialism - divorcement from this class has really meant that the IRA is just not revolutionary in relation to the objective needs of the only possible Irish Revolution.

The same is no less true if "left" slogans are grafted onto the old base, and a nominal "For Connolly's Workers' Republic" pinned to the masthead. Such talk, of a socialist programme, a Bolshevik party, a workers' republic, demands a proper appreciation of the relationship between the party and the working class, and the building up of this relationship, developing a Bolshevik skeletal structure in the broad labour movement, attempting to lead and co-ordinate struggles, making constant efforts to unite the Northern and Southern workers in their concrete class struggle. It demands a sharply critical approach to the traditional republican conceptions of revolutionary activity. Otherwise these slogans, combined with a largely military idea of the struggle against Imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie, will produce not a revolutionary Marxist party, but an abortion similar to the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia, against which the Bolsheviks fought bitterly.

Physical force – a principle?

There are those who fetishise 'physical force'; others who make of it a principle to oppose: those Fabians, social democrats and Stalinists who, in the words of the International's Transitional Programme "systematically implant in the minds of the workers the notion that the sacredness of democracy is best guaranteed when the bourgeoisie is armed to the teeth and the workers are unarmed."

Revolutionary Marxists, however, recognise that it is a practical question, a front of the class struggle which becomes more, or less, important according to the character and events of a given period. Moreover, that direct action of this sort is necessarily a function of the mass struggle, or it is impotent. The Transitional Programme continues: "Only armed workers' detachments who feel the solidarity of tens of millions of toilers behind them, can successfully prevail against the fascist bands. The struggle against fascism does not start in the liberal editorial office but in the factory - and ends in the street. Scabs and private gunmen in factory plants are the basic nuclei of the fascist army. Strike pickets are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army. This is our point of departure. In connection with every strike and street demonstration, it is imperative to propagate the necessity of creating workers groups for self defence. It is necessary to write this slogan into the programme of the revolutionary wing of the trade unions. It is imperative wherever possible, beginning with the youth groups, to organise groups for self defence, to drill and acquaint them with the use of arms ..."

If that passage treats the question of workers' militias as a defensive weapon, it is because it was written at the end of the thirties when workers' movements were being destroyed all over Europe, largely because of the pacifist cretinism of Stalinists and social democrats alike. But there are also times of the sharpest and most mature struggles (which are usually arrive at after long periods of limited struggles) when the military side comes to the fore decisively. However, whether defensive or otherwise, a militia is a means to an end, and a means which can avail nothing without a revolutionary conception and will, organised in a guiding Party centre, determined on workers' power. Even the best of militias, which is the Irish Citizen Army, can never be

a substitute for a Bolshevik party, which is a fusion of the different fronts of the class struggle including the militia. The early Communist Parties, and other organisations serious about organising the workers against capitalism, always used any opportunities, any upsets and struggle to create and strengthen armed workers' militias as auxiliaries of the general party; in fact the absence of attempts to create militias now in places where they have mass support – like France and Italy – is one mark of the decline of the CPs (they did, in fact, disarm the workers in Europe after World War II).

Finally, in this discussion, it must be remembered that the IRA is not even a workers' militia. And though, as in most armies, workers and small farmers form the majority of its members what is decisive is – who dominates? Which ideology? Which tactics? Its dominating ideology, as we have seen, is a mystical, narrow, petit-bourgeois nationalism, which is entirely contrary to the workers' necessarily international interests.

5. The current Sinn Fein situation – Round Three?

Cheap leftism is common in Ireland now: Connolly's name is bandied about loosely by all sorts of people. Sinn Fein mutters about the betrayal (in '56!) by "Gombeen capitalism". Even a chauvinistic Social Democrat like MacAonghusa declares for a "workers' Republic"! (which should remind us that Ramsay MacDonald once declared for Soviets). This loose phrasemongering is highly dangerous, and demands clarity from us: those who speak of socialism must be faced with a concrete programme of Bolshevism which will either expose them or clarify them.

After another period of stagnation following a bout of nominal activity a section of Sinn Fein has now turned towards legalisation. Sean Caughey took this road in 1965. What must the attitude of the class conscious workers be to this? We stand to gain from a breakaway towards legality by the Sinn Fein 'Right'. Leinster House will quickly show in their true colours those who now pretend to be revolutionary. But our gain is not inevitable: if we succeed in explaining to the honest IRA militants the basic lawfulness of the present movement, its real conservative connection with the past and the nature of Sinn Fein, we can raise the consciousness of some of those who resist the Right swing; but if the opposition to Johnson & Co confines itself to a sterile defence of the old ways (which of course bred the present swing) then that will be a defeat for us and a chance missed.

One old bogey drafted in for the current discussion is the question of parliamentary action. This, as such, is not an issue for revolutionaries. Reformists make a fetish of legality; but fetishising illegality is no less stupid. People who play with Marxist phrases without reference to reality contend that the existence of the IRA has meant a state of dual power in Ireland, preventing 'stabilisation'. Actually the only thing which has been prevented from reaching 'stability' is a genuine revolutionary movement; the 'hills' have merely functioned as a twin safety valve to emigration, to prevent Bourgeois Ireland from bursting at the seams.

Without a doubt a parliamentary break-off from Sinn Fein will be absorbed easily by the system. But that is because they are flesh of the Establishment's flesh: Sinn Feiners must fear parliament as a temptation. But for those who turn to the working class this does not necessarily apply; they can use parliament as a tactic, knowing that a genuine revolutionary remains so whether working within the bourgeois constitution or outside it. And in reverse, Sinn Fein itself demonstrates that a party which is socially non-revolutionary is no more so, no different, for being unconstitutional. The Bolsheviks managed to utilise the most reactionary of parliaments without becoming less

revolutionary - it gave them a platform which, because properly utilised, made them more, not less, effective. The only principle involved is the general one of being able to change one's forms of struggle as the struggle unfolds. In general revolutionaries should only refuse the attempt to utilise reactionary institutions when there is a chance of overthrowing them: only then does rigid non-participation become a matter of principle. In the current Sinn Fein situation it is not entry into the Dail that should be the issue – but their politics in parliament.

Naturally there are dangers for the best of organisations in each and every tactic: the danger of routinism, timeserving, accomodation etc. There is no guarantee, except the level of consciousness of the revolutionary instrument: the degree of democracy within it, the contact with the masses of the working class - and above all the degree of seriousness with which it continuously clarifies for itself all steps, possibilities and forces in each situation and at each sharp turn, in the fashion of the Bolsheviks

Gradualism and revolution

Another false issue is the counterposing of gradualism to guerilla war against the Border. This is the old vulgar counterposing of Evolution and Revolution, which is nonsensical. Revolution is the eruption in the change from quantity to quality; quantitative changes accumulating gradually up to the point of the revolution, and the change-over organically connected with, and presupposing, the previous evolution. There then takes place the unfolding of the accumulation of "20 years in a day." The proletarian revolution presupposes a revolutionary party: this must be built up gradually in limited struggles of the working class, in forging links with the class and between the different fronts of the struggle, educating and tempering its members as

the objective situation ripens. In Ireland, it is necessary to rechannel the energy prematurely expended and wasted on the isolated guerilla struggles, towards the labour movement. In this situation we must oppose both the idealist "revolution now" idea, and the vulgar modern Stalinist-Fabians with their new faith in the "inevitability of gradualness": and fight both these illusions in the name of a realistic Bolshevik policy of building and preparation for the future ripening and revolution.

On the Border question, ideally we would favour a revolutionary war against Imperialism. But for 40 years now there have been few takers for this. And failing a revolutionary reclarification in the 1920 period, the present evolution and rapprochement of the bourgeoisie is the result. The story of the IRA efforts to organise a war on the North and England is at best a tale of sound and fury told by a mystic and serving to illustrate the truth of Connolly's perception of the nature of the pure physical force movement: the only possible revolutionary ending of the Border is as an incidental in a proletarian revolution.

The position we are in dictates a period of slow uphill work; this is the prerequisite for any action against either the Imperialists or the bourgeoisie. It means for IRA activists not abandonment of militancy in favour of contemplative 'Marxism' – but an effort to understand the Bolshevik type of activism in the class struggle on the basis of a scientific analysis, learning to feel history's pulse as opposed to raging helplessly at it and dissipating vital energy. Our job is not to speculate on developments but to prepare a serious revolutionary organisation firmly based on working class struggle. *This is the immediate task and anything that detracts from it must be firmly put aside.*