

WORKERS' LIBERTY

no.5

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Provos, Protestants and class politics: the debate on Ireland

Background: chronology

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

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

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

1967 Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association formed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1976 Convention shut down by British government.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November: Anglo-Irish summit.

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

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

Some economic facts

NORTH AND SOUTH TODAY

The South is now (1984¹) slightly more industrialised than the North. This is a big change from the previous pattern.

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

GDP per head on average is almost exactly the same in the South and in the North. Social benefits are also on similar levels — 1982 figures¹ for social benefits per head of total population were UK £1110, 26 Counties £1040.

Major differences:

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

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

● The South is still more rural and agricultural. In the North a huge role is played by public service employment — 36% of total employment³. With higher unemployment (21% as against 17% in the South), over half the North's population is directly dependent on the British state for income (wage or benefit)⁴. Net subsidy from Britain to the North is £1.5 billion a year, about 30% of Northern Ireland's total income.

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

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

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE 26 COUNTIES SINCE 1958

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

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

IRELAND AND FOREIGN CAPITAL

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

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

Most of the foreign-owned companies are not from the country which the 26 Counties would presumably be a semi-colony of — Britain. Of about 900 foreign-owned companies, over 300 are US-owned, 130 West German, and only 200 or so UK-owned⁵.

And Ireland has been exporting capital since the 1870s. By 1914 Ireland was a creditor country and Irish capitalists had total investments abroad of £150 million⁶. A survey in 1964 found that Ireland had the fourth highest level of investment income from abroad, per head of population, in the world! Its inflow of investment income was \$104 million, its outflow \$67 million⁷. Only in more recent years has the inflow of capital to Ireland made it a clear debtor country.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the time of Partition there was a stark contrast between the North and the South. In 1911⁷ Ulster had 48% of all Ireland's industrial workers, and Belfast alone, 21%. The North exported manufactured goods internationally (a large proportion to the US); the South, agricultural produce, mainly to Britain.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ EEC statistics.

² Financial Times survey on Ireland, 8-7-80.

³ Irish Times, 26-8-85.

⁴ 1985. Figures in this table from World Bank and from Oxford Economic Atlas of the World.

⁵ J. M. Cullen 'An economic history of Ireland since 1690' p. 169ff.

⁶ 'Britain's Invisible Earnings' 1967, chapter on 'World Comparison of Invisibles'.

⁷ Michael Farrell, 'Northern Ireland: The Orange State'.

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

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

No.3 'Breaking the Chains: Black workers and the struggle for liberation in South Africa'. 75p.

No.4 'Under Whose Flag? Trotskyists today: working-class socialism or Third World nationalism?' 60p.



Ireland 1969-85

A socialist analysis

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Protestant youth in Belfast demonstrating against the Anglo-Irish deal

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II

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

mainstream British hard left on Ireland.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A way to workers' unity?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

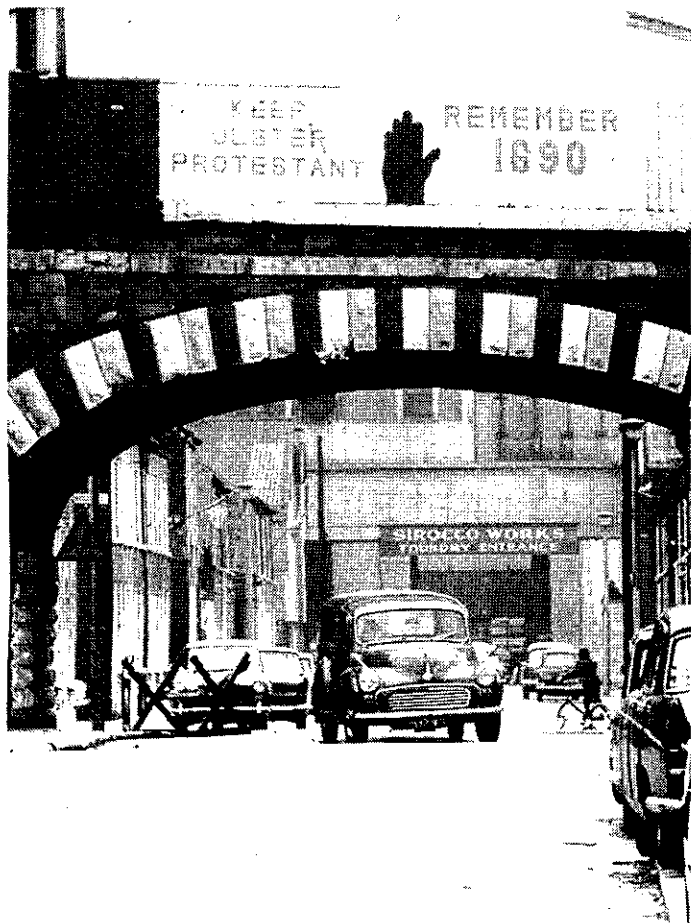
Many well-intentioned tricks have been tried to unite Northern Ireland workers. In 1907 Jim Larkin had united Protestant and Catholic workers on a trade union level. When it came to the marching and rioting season on July 12, he tried to preserve the unity by organising his own united Orange/Catholic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

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

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

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

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



candidates in the recent Six Counties election.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

No autonomy for pro-imperialists!

Tony Richardson
SO 115

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

us must be the struggle to end that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maximalist and abstract

Jim Denham
SO 116

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

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

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

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

land. A vicious circle, indeed!

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

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

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

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

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

Only for the oppressed

Tony Gard
SO 118

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

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

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

oppressed, disadvantaged minorities.

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

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

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

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

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

Naturally Protestants fear that they would be

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

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

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

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

Protestants and Provos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'The Protestants are a distinct community'

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

the rights of the much bigger Catholic Irish population.

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

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

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

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

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

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

'The Protestant... hostility to being incorporated as a minority in a backward and priest-ridden Catholic bourgeois state'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

moved South as refugees.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Connolly's Citizen Army outside ITGWU headquarters, Liberty Hall

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

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

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

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

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

The only way forward for the Protestant work-

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

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

We must instead be consistent democrats.

Part 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

united Ireland which bore any resemblance to the Southern state.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They have made no progress for eleven years.

Their recent Northern Ireland election success?

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

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

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

Often in history political actions produce results the opposite of

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

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

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

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

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

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

The only anti-imperialist programme for



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of kitsch 'Trotskyism'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lying pro-English rubbish

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peter Flack, SO 119

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

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

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

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

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

So, let us look at his glib

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The only such framework

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

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

Comrade O'Mahony, you should try thinking

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

Are we for class unity?

**Bruce
Robinson, SO
120**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the answer must be yes.

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

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

How the Protestants came to Ireland

**Jo Quigley
SO 121**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the areas of free immi-

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

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

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

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

I 640s to 1983

**Martin
Thomas SO121**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Catholics among the Anglo-Irish, and at times

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

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

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

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

Such also has been the programme of Catholic-led

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

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

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

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

Permanent Revolution is the answer

**Martin
Collins
SO 120**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Loyalist workers will only break from their bosses when

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

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

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

Clive Bradley
SO 125

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

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

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

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

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

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



RUC in action in Belfast

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Britain stays in Ireland to survive

**Mike Wall
(Irish
Freedom
Movement)
SO 123**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

refusal to oppose British imperialism consistently.

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

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

ialism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No to class unity

**Alistair Todd
SO 133**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

defending their privileged status.

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

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

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

Corroding internationalism

Jo Quigley, SO 137

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The significance that Todd wishes to attach to the sectarian

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ireland is not two nations

**John
O'Mahony,
SO 138**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Workers divided three ways

Bas Hardy
SO 140

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Was the action of the Lancashire workers then an exception?

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

The process asserts itself!

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

Dear John,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How this happened can be understood from three episodes.

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

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

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

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

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

3. Such fears multiplied exten-

sively and intensively because of the way Ulster was industrialised.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Permanent Revolution' instead of class unity

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

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

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

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

**Jim Denham,
SO 132**

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

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

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

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

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

Revolution' have had their way!

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

'Advocating measures to conciliate the Protestant working class'

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

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

The answer: spread to

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

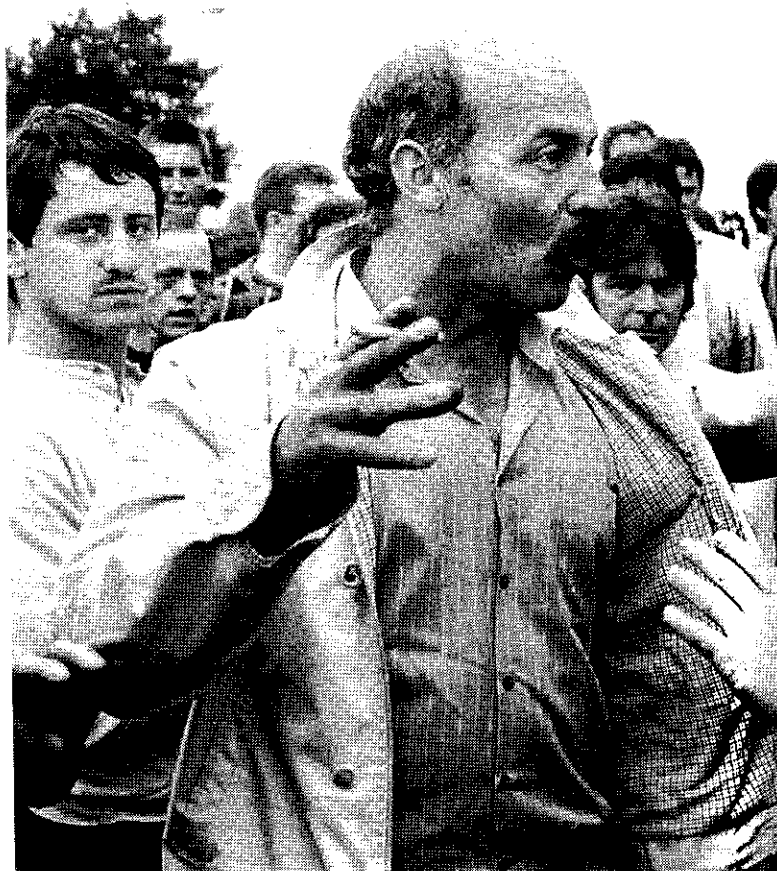
On the other hand, he has done this in the name of an uncertain middle way between the two nationists on the one hand and Peoples Democracy and the Republicans on the other (SO129).

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

the South



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Federalism is no solution



Guard of honour for H-Block prisoner Micky Devine

Tony Richardson, document circulated to SO supporters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'A federal solution would give control to the Protestants'

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

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

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

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

Nor should we get confused over the question of *democratic rights* for the loyalists. Everyone is in favour of maximum democratic rights for the Protestants in a united Ireland. But there is a vast difference between democratic rights and *control* which is the minimum that the loyalists will accept.

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

The reality is that there is no easy

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

The logic of O’Mahony’s position on Ireland

Tony Richardson, second document circulated to SO supporters

Reformism

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

In reality O’Mahony’s solution is

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

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

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

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

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

The Labour Party connection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



After Bobby Sands' death

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

Permanent Revolution and Ireland

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is the Community?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is hope

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Programme

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Provos, Protestants and working- class politics



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