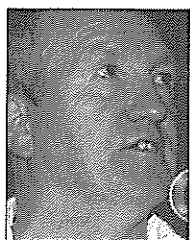


Ireland: class politics or communal strife



Sean

Matgamna: In Britain the situation in Ireland is presented as the republican movement being unreasonable,

being murderous, being psychopathic and so on. That's how the British press presents the central problem in Ireland. That, of course is nonsense.

I'm going to argue that Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA — which I take as one movement — is a big part of the problem in Northern Ireland. Not the basic problem, but a symptom that makes the basic problems worse, and in no sense part of the solution.

The fundamental problem in Ireland now is that the island is divided between two relatively distinct communities. There are various disputes about definitions, and I don't want to enter into those disputes. But the people who are broadly defined as Protestants or Unionists are distinct from the people who are broadly defined as Catholics, Nationalists or Republicans. In fact, the Protestants would define themselves mostly as British. There are perhaps 4.5 million Catholics / Nationalists / Republicans, perhaps something over one million Unionists / Protestants.

The Protestants — I'll call them Protestants but all the rest is implied — are dispersed throughout the island, but most of them, the Protestants that we are talking about, are a concentrated majority in North East Ulster. And these people have quite distinct traditions.

They were originally a colony put down in Ireland 400 years ago, during the time when Ireland was dominated by Britain. In the 18th century Irish Catholics suffered under a system against the Catholics very like apartheid in South Africa. In theory you could change your religion, and you can't change the colour of your skin, but in reality not very many changed their religion.

The problem of Irish politics today — especially working-class politics — is how to unite the two sorts of Irish, and whether they can be united. History shows that it is not possible to combine a United Ireland with an independent Ireland. The minority in north-east Ulster refuses to be part of a united independent Ireland in which they would be a minority at the mercy (as they see it) of a Catholic, Nationalist, Republican majority they consider to be alien.

Thus, the question of how to get a democratic, workable, living relationship between the majority and the minority becomes

Armed conflict in Northern Ireland is escalating once more. Francis Molloy, putting the Sinn Féin/Provisional IRA point of view, and Sean Matgamna of *Workers' Liberty*, debated the politics of modern Ireland at the *Workers' Liberty* summer school.

the dominant one.

Relations between Ireland's Protestant minority and its Catholic majority have been complicated by the intervention of Britain. Instead of the Protestants and Catholics on the island working out how to relate to each other without British interference, what we got was the British and the Unionists partitioning Ireland in a particularly messy, stupid way. They created a Northern Irish state that is plainly

untenable and can not continue to exist in its present form.

Why did they do that? Britain wanted to control Ireland for imperial military reasons. When Britain finally granted most of Ireland a limited form of home rule in 1921-22, it maintained British bases in the South — for example, in Cork, up to 1938.

Britain used the Orange, Protestant, Unionist minority to hold on in north-east Ulster, "playing the Orange Card", as one politician put it. They used them against the majority of the Irish, initially, to argue that no part of Ireland should be independent and that because of the division, all parts of Ireland had to remain subordinate to Britain. When that failed to derail the movement for Irish independence they compromised — they partitioned the country.

I'm a socialist. I don't believe any people — Protestants in Ireland, or Irish people in the old UK, when it included all Ireland — should be forced to remain in a state against their will, if it is possible for them to separate. In theory, you could make a serious case for the separation of north-east Ulster, where Protestants are the compact majority. But they didn't separate north-east Ulster! They separated six counties which at that time had about a 35% Catholic minority within them. It was the majority in about half the land area of the Six Counties.

Thus we got the abomination, the monstrosity of a so-called "Protestant state for a Protestant people" with a Catholic minority within it that was a bigger proportion of the Six Counties' population than the Protestants of all Ireland would have been as a minority in an all-Ireland state.

It was only by way of British intervention that Ireland could have been carved up in this way. And in fact they destroyed it for themselves. If the Protestant Unionists and the British had been less greedy, if they'd taken only the areas with a clear Protestant majority, then they would probably be impregnable now. There might still be a big Catholic minority in Belfast, but this "Protestant state" would not have the vast heartlands of Catholic majority population it has now.

In 1918, Sinn Fein, not this Sinn Fein, but one of its ancestors, also called Sinn Fein, stood in the British general election, saying that if they won an Irish majority they would secede from the Westminster Parliament and set up a Dublin parliament. They got the majority and set up a Dublin government.

The British responded with a reign of terror against nationalist Ireland and against the new Dublin government. They went around the county burning towns and villages, engaging in systematic atrocities against the people, burning small factories, in order to break the will of the Irish nationalists.

When it came to negotiations in 1921, Sinn Fein only agreed to the partition under threat from British prime minister Lloyd George that the alternative was an "immediate and terrible war". We know now that Britain had plans to round up a large part of the population in the south and put them in concentration camps so that they could not support the Irish nationalist guerrilla army. Concentration camps then did not mean death camps, but simply "concentrations" of population. Such camps had been used by the British in the Boer War to stop the civilian population supporting the Boer guerrillas. They were now prepared to do the same to a vastly larger number of the nationalist Irish.

Even so, Sinn Fein's delegates accepted partition only for a limited period of time — or so they thought. They were promised that within a few years there would be a re-arrangement of the borders so that the Catholic areas in the north would be able to secede to the south. They believed that if that happened the Protestant areas would not be viable on their own and would join a united Ireland. Lloyd George argued that with them, anyway, though in retrospect it is a doubtful proposition.

But they were tricked. It didn't happen. The existing partition stayed, creating a murderous, nonsensical entity, the "Protestant" Six Counties, where today the Catholics are perhaps 45% of the population! In this so-called Protestant state for a Protestant people the British have not allowed the Protestant majority to rule themselves internally for the last 22 years because when they did rule internally they ruled to keep the Catholics down.

Now, Catholics were kept down not because the Protestants were nasty people, but because such a big minority was seen as, and in reality was, a threat to the Six Counties state. A decade or fifteen or twenty years from now Catholics could be the majority in the Six Counties. The Protestants saw this threat long ago and treated the Catholics as second class citizens. The dominant Protestant community took as many jobs as it could for itself, in conditions of chronic mass unemployment. At the end of the '60s, after fifty years, the Catholics revolted.

A big Catholic civil rights movement, modelled on the American black civil rights movement, took to the streets of Northern Ireland demanding equal rights and equal treatment with Protestants, what they called "British standards" — "one man one vote, one man one job, one man one house". Into this situation jumped the Provisional IRA, demanding a united Ireland. That compounded the tragedy.

If there is a big, powerful Irish Protestant minority that doesn't want to be in a united Ireland, then how can they be got into a united Ireland?

Only by way of persuasion, never by way of coercion. If you doubt that, the actions of Northern Ireland's Catholics should convince you. About half a million Catholics, perhaps one-third of them actively or passively supporting the Provisional IRA, have made the Six Counties ungovernable for over two decades.

One million Protestants held against their will in a united Ireland would be able to do at least as much.

You cannot solve this conflict within the Irish people by way of force! You cannot do it. The Protestants cowed and coerced half a million Catholics for fifty years — and then they revolted. Coerced Protestants would do the same.

The Provisional IRA which sprang into the situation created by the civil rights movement in 1968-70 was committed to the following fundamentally wrong and quite delirious set of ideas.

They defined Northern Ireland as "British-occupied Ireland". It is only "British-occupied Ireland" because a million Irish people want it to be "occupied" — a million Irish people who say that they are British.

Calling it "British-occupied Ireland" is radically misleading, and it led the first "Provos" to think that all they had to do to "free Ireland" was to attack the British. The truth is that talk about "Brits out" often sounds to Protestants like a slogan meaning, "me out", because they think of themselves as "Brits." That has been the false premise on which the PIRA built their whole campaign.

The second false idea was the rigid dogma that the only way forward must on principle be armed force.

The Irish republican movement is a very old movement. It has its roots way back in the communistic French secret societies of the 1850s. There are a number of different strains within that republican movement.

Around 1970, the strain of republicanism which is now the PIRA believed in "physical force" on principle, and that anything else was morally wrong. They launched a guerrilla war, at first based

on a very small minority of the Six Counties Catholic minority. Why? It was wrong, they said, to engage in politics in the London, Dublin and Belfast parliaments.

Thus, we have had 23 years of a war launched by a movement based on radically false ideas and judgements — in fact, on pernicious ideas and pernicious

misjudgement.

Let me repeat: the idea that the basic problem is Britain occupying part of Ireland, the idea that it is only Britain that keeps Ireland divided, is pernicious and nonsensical. The Provos' 23 year war proves that — it seems to have proved it even to some of the leaders of the IRA!

A million Irish people want Ireland divided and are willing to fight to maintain the Northern sub-state: they have organised a general strike, armed militias, and indiscriminate sectarian slaughter against Catholics chosen at random — seeing the Catholics in the north as the enemy within, the fifth column for the 26 county Irish state.

A million Irish people reject the idea of a united Ireland and therefore, one of two things must happen.

Either they are going to be coerced — and they can't be coerced: probably they could not be coerced even by the entire Catholic population of Ireland, and they're certainly not going to be coerced by the half-million Northern Irish Catholics, or the minority of that half million who support the Provisional IRA — *or* they are going to be persuaded. Unless they are persuaded there is going to be no united Ireland!

Ignoring the fundamental truths, the Provisional IRA launched a military campaign which has made the whole situation far worse than it was 25 years ago. That campaign is a big part of the problem now; it is no part of the solution.

The brute reality is that the main opposition to a united Ireland is an Irish opposition. Therefore the Provisional IRA campaign, though dressed up in anti-British political terms, is directed fundamentally against Irish Protestants. British soldiers are shot, of course, but over two decades it has increasingly become a campaign against Irish Protestants, defined as "people who collaborate

"The Provisional IRA campaign offers no possibility of progress. It is a big and often defining part of the problem, not a solution."



Protestants confront RUC during the "marching season". The fundamental opposition to a United Ireland is Protestant Irish opposition, and therefore the Protestants "collaborate" with the British.

with the state;" or "people who play a part in sustaining the state".

There is a difference, which I do not want to blur, between the UDA, the UVF and the UFF, on the one hand, and the Provisional IRA on the other. To a large extent, the ideas around which the Protestant militarists rally are traditional imperialist ideas. They are ideas about superiority and delusions about being Ireland's master race. They behave accordingly: some of them go out and, without apology, kill Catholics at random.

Except for a few pseudo-left pseudo-Republicans who go in for assassinating Protestants as Protestants, you do not get this on the Republican side. They know better. Their movement has some of its roots in a progressive and enlightened outlook on the world. The idea that all the people of Ireland are equal is a central dogma of Republicanism, and such ideas inhibit Republicans, at least in what they say.

What they do is a different matter. The Provisional IRA only dresses up what it does in a better suit of political clothing than the Protestant paramilitaries can manage.

The Provisional IRA claims and exercises the right to shoot workers — Protestant or Catholic, but in practice usually Protestants — who do such work as fixing a window in a police station. This is not too different, despite the political colouring which Republican tradition forces them to adopt, from what the Protestant sectarian killers do.

The reason for this is not, as the British press says, that the Provisional IRA are psychopaths, but that the communalist logic of the situation asserts itself.

The fundamental opposition to a United Ireland is Protestant Irish opposition, and therefore the Protestants "collaborate" with the British. They regard the British state as their state. The Provisional IRA's war "on Britain" translates itself under pressure of reality into a war on Irish Protestants. If you declare war on the British state in Northern Ireland you are, inescapably, declaring war on the Irish Protestant minority who support that state as their state. That is the terrible reality.

This is how people who call themselves Republicans and fol-

lowers of Wolfe Tone, James Connolly, Patrick Pearse and Liam Mellows, come, despite the fine words they sometimes speak, to act as Catholic sectarians.

The Provisional IRA is not responsible for the Catholic/Protestant division in the Six Counties, but it has made the divide much sharper, deeper, broader and bloodier.

By creating the present Catholic minority in the Six Counties, Partition also divided the Catholic people of Ireland. The Northern and Southern Catholic/Nationalists are miles apart. Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA have the support of a big minority of the Catholic community in the North — their highest-ever vote was 42% of the Catholics — but Sinn Féin has very little support in the South, not more than 1.5% of the vote in the South in recent times. Their claim to represent the Irish people is utterly false.

The Provisional IRA's war cannot win any of its objectives. If the IRA's war succeeded in getting Britain to withdraw, and it will not, the consequence could not be a united Ireland. If the British withdrew without a political settlement the Protestants would fight to win their own self-determination from the rest of Ireland. They are armed. They will fight.

In the early 1970s they organised a powerful mass armed militia. They organised a powerful general strike that defeated the British government in 1974.

Faced with British withdrawal, without a political settlement which satisfied the Irish minority, you would get the repartition, not the unity, of Ireland. Probably the Catholic areas of the North would secede to the south, and in Belfast you would get mass slaughter on the model of Bosnia and Beirut. British withdrawal without a political settlement would end all hope of Irish unity for — probably — centuries.

The British are not going to agree to pull out. We should not want them to pull out without a political settlement! I do not want to see Ireland pulled apart in full-scale civil war. I do not want to see Belfast reduced to the conditions of Sarajevo or 1980s Beirut.

The war is a war that cannot be won. It would be a good thing

for that war to stop. There are signs of serious moves to stop it. This is good — without qualification. The war has not brought a united Ireland one inch nearer. Arguably, it has pushed it way back.

If the war ends, it will be without victory for the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein. It will be a terrible comment on the last 25 years, a massive condemnation of everything the Provos have done.

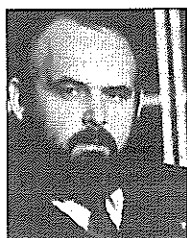
Sinn Fein has changed much in the last 25 years. It has shed many of its starting principles. It no longer rejects entry into the Dublin parliament. It has vastly expanded its political operations since the 1981 hunger strike. It may be about to declare that there are other acceptable means to its end than armed struggle.

There are people inside Sinn Fein who are socialists. I do not know if the people here today are in that category. But the way forward for socialism in Ireland must be by way of a radical criticism of the Sinn Fein/Provisional IRA tradition.

Provisional Sinn Fein is not the first republican movement to talk about going into mainstream politics. Fianna Fail began as a similar movement. In power, it was a conservative, quite right-wing force. In the 1940s another party, Clann na Poblachta, led by people who had led the IRA in the 1930s, went the same route. Today, the Democratic Left/Workers' Party, the former IRA of the 1960s, are not exactly the vanguard of the progressive forces in Ireland!

There is no reason to doubt that if Sinn Fein goes political it will become another bourgeois force on the model of Fianna Fail, Clann na Poblachta, and the Workers' Party, but based on a more limited constituency, that of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. That will not be progress, except for ending the war.

From a socialist point of view, our cardinal concern is to unite the Irish working class. Irish workers will never unite through a military campaign which most Protestants see as directed against them. Socialists, British and Irish, should tell the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein: call off this senseless, counterproductive, and sectarian war. Now!



Francis Molloy: I need to deal with all of the inaccuracies in the last speaker's contribution before we go off on a tangent. This is part of the disinformation which has gone on for so long.

A divided Ireland has come about by the British imposing partition on the people of Ireland. At no stage did Republicans or Sinn Fein ever

accept partition. The partition which was imposed was only part of the settlement. A boundary commission never met and was disposed of by the British after the Six Counties was established.

The Loyalists in the Six Counties have always been encouraged by Unionists here — by the Conservative and Unionist party here — to fight. Churchill's saying "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right" was always part of the strategy of inciting and encouraging violence inside Ireland. They wanted to divide and conquer. It has always been Britain's policy. Britain has played the Orange card when it suited them, and withdrawn it when it suited.

Unionists in the North have always refused to be part of an all-Ireland state because they historically, were a planter nation within Ireland. There is also a similarity between the Protestants of the North and the people of the rest of the island. But there was a reason why they were put in there.

The British government, in order to stabilise their control over Ireland, planted a population into the six north-eastern counties to control and dominate what was at that time the most disruptive section of the population. They wanted their solution to the land question.

But what we have failed to take account of is the coercion of nationalists into the Six County state, against their will. They have been part of it for 70 years.

No one has yet taken up their cause. The British government

always blamed Stormont for Unionist discrimination. But we have had over 20 years of British direct rule. The British government have not tried to change matters. In fact it could be said that discrimination has been greater under direct rule.

Is Sinn Fein today different from the Sinn Fein of 1918? No, it is not. It is the same party. There has never been a break in our structure since 1918, and before, from 1908, when Arthur Griffith formed it. People have left Sinn Fein and gone in different directions. Some people have got what they wanted out of the struggle. But Sinn Fein today is the same Sinn Fein which won 75% of the vote in the 1918 elections.

The Irish people did decide they wanted an independent Ireland. They even decided in a Parliamentary election, based on Westminster constituencies, that they wanted an independent Ireland. What did Britain do? Simply passed it aside and partitioned the country. As in many other places, they divided and conquered.

The last speaker said that the IRA jumped on the civil rights bandwagon. I participated in the civil rights campaign. In 1968 I picketed outside a courthouse in a totally Loyalist town against the fact that people had been discriminated against in housing. When we made a protest we were stopped. I know what it was about. I know the part the Republicans played in it.

Okay, it could be said that this was before the split in the movement. Those now in the Democratic Left/Workers' Party played a big part in the civil rights movement. But the Sinn Fein structure remained united right through this period.

It is very easy for those sitting on the sidelines, in the safety of London or Dublin, to say to the people of Armagh, you should not defend yourselves. I was in Armagh the night that John Callaghan was shot dead. The B-Specials, an armed wing of the Unionist Party, shot down that man as he protested on the streets as part of a demonstration looking for civil rights. They were looking for British rights — that's what they were looking for. They wanted the same rights as those living in Finchley, or anywhere else.

But the IRA could not stand idly by, as Jack Lynch did later on, and watch people being slaughtered in the streets. It was not an organised IRA that reacted, but the armed militia of the people. For people to say that we should have just sat there and got more people shot, until we were shot off the streets, is to ignore the reality of the situation.

The British granting of a veto to Unionists has always been the problem in Ireland. There is the same problem today. The Downing Street Declaration reinforces that veto, over and over again. It does not change the situation. It says to the Unionist population: if you do not want to go up that road, you do not have to do so.

Imagine living with a child who does not want to go to school and saying "well, you do not have to go to school." The Protestants have been acting like spoilt children for so long. They have been saying they will not go because there is nothing there for us.

Until the British government actually says to them that their best interests are served by building a new Ireland — their traditions and culture can be recognised within that new Ireland — they will not move. It is only after the British say this to them that they will participate in building a new Ireland.

The IRA or the Republican movement have never stated that armed struggle was the only way forward. Otherwise we would not be involved in Sinn Fein or the civil rights campaign or the prison protests or the other campaigns we are involved in.

We are the people who have said time and time again that we want to take the gun out of Irish politics. But there are more people at the table than the IRA. There are people with bigger and better armaments than the IRA will ever have. Those people are controlling the destiny of the people of Ireland. They also control the destiny of the people of this country.

The speaker criticised abstentionism. Abstentionism still is our



Sinn Féin, unlike Nationalist MP John Hume, does not believe in going to Westminster

policy and we make no apology for it. We have not changed. We still refuse to go to Westminster. We are talking about principles here.

Gerry Adams, as MP for West Belfast, never took his salary. We have principles — and compare them to any other elected representative! We say: Britain has no right to be in our country, so why should we sit in their parliament? Even if all of the 17 Six Counties MPs were Sinn Féin MPs, what effect would they have in Westminster? Censorship would ensure that our voice would not even be heard in Parliament itself, or in the outside media. Participation in Westminster serves no purpose.

Republicanism started this peace process. We have not been driven into it. We began it because it is our people who are suffering. Our people are in jail. Our people are being murdered. Every day our people campaign politically with the threat of the gun over their heads.

We, the Nationalist people in the Six Counties, have been coerced by force of arms — by both the British and Unionists. "Collusion" has never been mentioned, because collusion is the main point of the corrupt system in the Six Counties.

The British government tried for years with a shoot-to-kill policy. It became a political problem. So they re-wound up the Loyalist population. They provided guns to Loyalist paramilitaries, brought through their agent Brian Nelson from South Africa. Nelson was brought from Germany by Tom King.

This was the person who was shooting people. This was the person who shot a solicitor in Belfast who had been defending Republicans. This is the sort of British coercion that the Nationalist people faced.

We want Unionist consent in building a new Ireland. We recognise we must have that consent. We want an Ireland where we can bring together all political persuasions.

We can call a conference of all Irish people to decide the new type of Ireland which we want to build. We want the Unionists

at the conference, to defend their traditions. We, the Republicans, defend their right to do that.

We are not coercing any Unionist into a United Ireland.

But we have to recognise the reality of the situation. The Unionists are a minority within Ireland. The majority of people decided they wanted an independent Ireland and were denied it.

The British government are now saying that they want the people of the North and the people of the South to self-determine their own futures. Well, the people of the South have had their self-determination. We, as Republicans, might maintain that it was imposed, it was not a free choice.

The people of the North also need the right to self-determine — but to do so without the artificial boundary created by Britain. The border has been maintained by British guns. It has been the main problem in creating a new Ireland. That border must be removed.

We are asking the British government to facilitate a conference of all Irish people, in order that we may as a nation decide our own future without outside interference. In these circumstances the Unionists will attend that conference. But the British government, the main player in the situation, must facilitate this conference. We are asking them to become the persuaders. At the moment, and for the last twenty years, the British government are saying that their best interests are served by a united Ireland. We want the British to become the honest broker they have never been.

The issue of the IRA campaign has been raised. I cannot answer for them. I am not a member of the IRA. However some points can be answered.

The IRA shoot Protestants because they are Protestants? Nothing could be more ridiculous. If the IRA has wanted to shoot Protestants over the last 25 years, it would have been very simple.

I live in a Protestant, totally Loyalist area. I have never interfered with them. Any interference has been from the upper-class Unionist politicians, who have used the ordinary working-class Protestants to try to intimidate Catholic people out of their land, so they can expand.

One interesting issue has been raised as part of the review of parliamentary constituency boundaries during the last few months. Of the 17 constituencies in the North, five lie to the west of a straight line drawn down through Lough Neagh, and 12 are east of that line. All the development and job creation for the last 70 years is east of the line. The west has been deprived, and it is a quite deliberate policy. They want people to emigrate to find work, so they can extend their plantation.

Do the IRA shoot building workers? "Building workers" is a simple term. These people are rebuilding structures that have been designed to control the nationalist population — these are barracks, army compounds and the torture centres of Castlereagh and elsewhere. The IRA have demolished them and building workers have been brought in to rebuild them. These people are colluding with the occupation force.

I am certain that the IRA never asked: are you a Protestant? Are you a Catholic? There are plenty of Catholic workers on these sites. So the target is not Catholic or Protestant. The target is the job that is being done. That job is the re-establishment of British control in the Six Counties every time the IRA cause a rift in that control.

It is interesting that the speaker actually takes the line that the oppressed are wrong. That the oppressed must get down on their knees and apologise for being oppressed. I would have expected socialists and working-class people should look at the problems created by the oppressor.

The Ulster Workers' Council Strike was referred to. The point was not that the Protestant working class were taking on the British administration and defeating them. They did not defeat them. They co-operated with them. The British army soldiers and

RUC stood by at check points with armed UDA men who had cudgels and sticks. They were there to enforce the barricades, not trying to smash them. There was no attempt made by the British army or the RUC to dismantle the barricades during the UWC strike.

After the strike was over the leader of it, Glen Barr, got a government job in Derry creating jobs for young people. What other person who would bring down the establishment would get a government job afterwards?

It would be wrong to miss the opportunity to say what we are doing to persuade Unionists that their best interest lie within an all-Ireland state.

I, as a councillor in County Tyrone, provide two constituency offices, one in Dungannon and one in Coalisland. Over the last three years our surveys show that 30% of the people we represent on a daily basis over housing and other social matters come from the Loyalist community. We do not only represent the Catholic community. We represent those within the areas we are elected from.

We accept there are limits to our ability to reach the Loyalist community, but we are doing our best.

At the moment your country, Britain, is being run by 10 Unionist MPs. This is occupation in reverse. They are responsible for NHS cuts, school closures. They are keeping the Tories in power.

Unionists talk about representing the working class of the Shankill Road. If anyone knows the background of these individuals they will know that they are capitalists who are playing the Orange card. They use the grievances of the Shankill Road.

If unemployment is 70% in the Shankill Road — and I am not sure it is — then we condemn that.

But the people who made it 70% are the Unionist politicians. They are part of the government administration.

Do not let anyone tell you that these people represent the working class. Can the working-class Protestants ever shake off the shackles of Unionist control and the Orange order? When Larkin tried to organise in Belfast, the Orange Order moved in at high speed to ensure that he did not get across to working-class people. They divided and conquered on behalf of their political masters, the British government.

We need to deal with reality. We in Sinn Féin have put out the hand of friendship. Too often it has been cut off.

We need to deal with reality. We in Sinn Féin have put out the hand of friendship. Too often it has been cut off.

Francis Molloy summing up: I think that people who sit here and say Gerry Adams should walk down the Shankill Road saying, "OK lads, let's sit down and sort out this Six Counties problem," are a bit naive. The reality is that this will not happen. We are saying that you need a conference which the British facilitate.

Whether you like it or not the problem is the British occupation of our country. The six occupied counties have a population that remains loyal to the British. That is what they were put there to do.

How do we get over that problem? We want to talk to the Unionist population. We want to sort out how we can best govern the island of Ireland. We want a conference of all Irish people. We accept that before that conference we would put our policy of a unitary state. We accept that that conference may come out with alternative ways of governing Ireland. It may be federalism. It may be any of a number of ideas. As Republicans we are interested in such a discussion.

The Unionists want to go back into Stormont. Maybe we should have the all-Irish parliament there. We would see then how conciliatory some people are.

As regards poverty and the Shankill Road. Yes, poverty exists — it exists in the same way poverty exists in the Falls Road. The

nationalist and Unionist politicians agreed to differ and apportion out the housing in each area. It did not matter about the standard of housing — so long as it kept the people quiet. Poverty in the Shankill road is down to years and years of Unionist misrule, followed by years and years of direct British misrule.

To deal with the issue of building workers. Now, I can not speak for the IRA; I represent Sinn Féin, a legitimate political party with a democratic mandate in Ireland.

Our policy is for demilitarisation of the situation. There are a lot more weapons than those that are held by the IRA. The major factor is the British government. The other factor is the loyalist paramilitaries. We believe that the loyalist paramilitaries are armed and directed by the British establishment. It is an illusion that the British government is the honest broker standing between the warring factions.

There is an old joke in Ireland that the loyalist population will fight to the last British soldier. Now I believe that if the British soldiers are removed and the British remove the veto then the Unionists will sit down with us. They will not be coerced.

I work with Unionists and Protestants. The idea that Protestants are opposed to every move towards a united Ireland is wrong. I went to a conference recently in Dungannon where a Protestant woman — an RUC man's wife — said that she did not believe that one million Protestants are opposed to a united Ireland. Part of the million Protestants want to discuss how we can get peace.

The speaker said we did not put forward our policies in the Falls Road. I would ask the speaker to stand for election in the Falls Road and put forward his policies. We will put forward ours. Let's see who is elected.

The cause of British occupation. The reality is that occupation does not cost Britain as much as it is supposed. Most of the money that is spent in the six counties is from the European exchequer. The British government is supposed to match this money pound for pound. Does it do that? No!

On reconciling differences. People should read our policies. We have a policy document, "Towards a lasting peace in Ireland," dealing with the process. We are the only party in Ireland which has put on paper proposals for ending the conflict.

We do not have to restate and restate that our policy is to build a socialist Ireland. But we also have political reality. Until we can decide what type of Ireland we want, there is no point in discussing the matter. For those who say "wait until the revolution is here" — well, we have not got the time. Our cause is urgent. We want to live in peace today.

You say loyalist violence is simply reactive to IRA violence. This is an illusion. Every time nationalism takes some strides forward the first thing you see is a renewal of the loyalist paramilitaries.

Loyalism is defending its privileges and perks. They do not want to live in a society where everyone is equal.

We are saying to the Unionists that we want them to be part of the Irish nation. This is better than what Britain offers.

We want the British government out of Ireland. They should facilitate a conference so that we can talk to the Unionists.

Sean Matgamna summing up: The half-truth is the enemy of the truth. We have had a series of half-truths from the Sinn Féin speaker. There has been much misrepresentation and demagoguery.

Let's define what we have in common.

Are we against the Catholics defending themselves? No, we are not. Are we unwilling to stand up to the British state? Nonsense! We are the only one of the British left groups that has been raided by armed police for our stand on Ireland, in the 1970s.

The idea that we are not sympathetic to Republicans who have been tortured by the British state is demagogic nonsense.

There is an Irish political expression — "the politics of the last atrocity" — which means that when there are atrocities on each side, you can not let your reaction be governed by horror at the last atrocity. Six men are killed watching the World Cup and we react with horror against the Protestants; go back a bit further to last October [1993] and 10 people are killed by the PIRA in the Shankill. Then you react against the Republicans. You can not make your mind up by simply saying: the British torture people and that's terrible. You need an overview.

The problem with the half-truth is that it has no overview.

The point has been made that Sinn Fein is not socialist. I would add that Sinn Fein is not republican! You can not have republicanism in the spirit of Pearse, Connolly and Tone which does not regard all the people of Ireland as equal, not just in words but in deeds.

The Declaration of Independence of 1916 plainly states that the Republic would treat "all the children of the nation" equally. You can not be a republican unless you regard the Protestants as having equal rights. Then it becomes a matter of defining their rights when they say that they are different from the rest of the Irish, and will not be subordinate.

Padraig Pearse, for example, rejected the idea that you could coerce the Protestants. You can not be a republican and treat one million people on the island of Ireland as second-class citizens. You can not be a republican and regard them as enemies — unless they do what the majority wants. You can not coerce them into "consent".

About majorities and minorities, we do not just say that the minority must submit. For example, in the old United Kingdom the Irish were a small minority. If you apply the approach which says minorities must obey the majority, the whole idea of Ireland having the right to secede has to be rejected.

Consistent democrats accept that there are minorities within minorities. The minority in Ireland has collective rights. They do not have the right to oppress Catholics. Their rights may include the right to secede. What is wrong with the Six Counties is not that it is "a Protestant state for a Protestant people" — what is wrong is that it is an imperialist abortion, with a vast Catholic minority. So it is untenable.

The speaker has claimed that Sinn Fein never changed. Sinn Fein began in 1904 or 1905 as a monarchist party! It was committed to a dual monarchy between Britain and Ireland. It became the Republican Party in 1917. It split in 1922-23, and then again with De Valera in the mid-twenties. In 1921 the Sinn Fein MPs, in their majority, did vote to accept partition.

All this is small beer — but it is an example of mystification. Another example: it is not true that 75% voted for Sinn Fein in 1918. Actually, 48% in Ireland voted for Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein got 73 out of 105 seats because 25 seats went to them uncontested in the South. It was not such a sweeping majority, though it was a majority.

I am for that majority. I am for that Sinn Fein. But we should try to relate to history as history, not as convenient mythology.

Francis Molloy made the demagogic point that it is easy to be in London and not understand why the Catholics need to defend themselves. The truth is that, in its origins, the Provisional IRA had nothing at all to do with defending the Catholics. In 1969 when sectarian violence started the IRA was a united body led by Stalinists, and it had more or less disarmed itself. The IRA had nothing to do with defending the Catholic areas!

As it happens, I was there, in Derry. I know this is the truth. The Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry were barricaded. The British army were on one side with machine guns, and we on the other side had mainly hurley sticks, not Provisional IRA guns.

The Provisional IRA split from the older Stalinist-led IRA because they failed to defend the Catholics — or so they said. Then the Provisional IRA launched a military offensive.

In 1971-2 they bombed the centre out of most Northern Irish cities and towns. That was not defending the Catholics, either. The truth is that the Protestant ultras were a small minority of Protestants before the PIRA military offensive of 1971. Afterwards, for a while, the ultras became a majority with an armed mass movement, the UDA. There were 35,000 or 40,000 armed people in the UDA in 1972.

I would certainly not argue against the right of the Catholic community to defend itself. But you do not defend yourself by declaring you will shoot workers who do any work that can be construed as work for the British state.

When I spoke earlier on I said that "collaborating" Catholic workers could also, in Provisional IRA theory, be shot. But in practice it is mainly Protestants. The truth is that the Protestants regard the British state as their

**REPUBLICANS, GAELS
NATIONALISTS of
FERMANAGH S. TYRONE**

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CLEAR CHOICE**



**FRANCIE
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Molloy and win.

Vote for real change.
Vote Nationalist.
Vote Republican.
Stand up and be counted
now.

MOLLOY X

Sinn Fein at grass roots is not a republican and still less a socialist force. It is a communalist movement. In the areas of the Six Counties where Catholics have the majority it presents itself, as these election appeals demonstrate, unashamedly as a Catholic sectarian movement and asks for election support on that basis.

From Fermanagh Herald, April 1992

**PEOPLE OF
FERMANAGH
SOUTH TYRONE**

Did you realise that there are

71,474

Electors on the Register

31,400

TOTAL Unionist electorate

40,074

**Total Nationalist
Electorate**

**EVERY VOTE WILL
COUNT — ONLY MOLLOY
CAN WIN
— VOTE —**

MOLLOY X

state.

It is nonsense to suggest it is a matter of British occupied Ireland and this is just a war against the British state. This translates in a war situation to a war against that part of the population who regard the British state as their state. That is why, to a large extent, the IRA war is a war against the Protestants. It is a war against Irish people.

Is there a civil war going on? Yes, there is a subterranean civil war. In this situation you get the double-talk of the demand for the Protestants to sit down "at a table". If they sit down at a table, what happens if they do not agree with you? After six months? A year? Will you then accept their right not to be forced into a United Ireland?

The idea that Britain can persuade the Protestants — what does it mean? Britain has tried and the Protestants have reacted against them.

It was not the IRA that smashed Britain's attempts to set up a powersharing new political structure — it was the Protestant general strike [May 1974].* I think it is true that at the beginning that strike probably had a lot of coercion in it. But anyone who denies that after the second or third day that general strike was a real, mass movement of Protestants — a movement so strong it defeated and broke the will of the British government — is living in cloud-cuckoo land.

Britain will not persuade the Protestants with a few nice words. The Protestants do not trust the British or the Dublin politicians. The call for Britain to "persuade" is really a call for Britain to coerce.

You have the following paradox: the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein — which has the same political line — demand that Britain coerce the Protestants! What could be more nonsensical than the Provisional IRA trying to coerce the British into coercing the Protestants into a United Ireland? Yet that is their basic "strategy"?

The Sinn Fein speaker says he wants Unionist consent. This is double-talk. You actually want Unionist consent, or else. Or else — we will continue to attack you.

If we plainly sum up what the Provisionals are doing, its nonsensical character is obvious. The fact is that Sinn Fein does not want an Irish solution to the conflict — they want a British solution!

The British have played a god-damned awful role. They continue that role by maintaining the artificial Six Counties entity. But the underlying logic of Sinn Fein's policy is the demand for the British to become super-benign fairy godmothers for Irish nationalism!

We want an intra-Irish solution by agreement between the sections of the Irish people. Sinn Fein want a solution by way of Britain strong-arming the Protestants! Fantasy could not become more fantastical!

I think, these days, the British would in principle be willing to coerce the Protestants. No section of the British ruling class now supports the Protestants in Ireland. Britain has no military interest in being in Ireland — as it did during the Second World War and even afterwards. Britain certainly has no economic interest in controlling Northern Ireland.

But, if they tried to get out by coercing the Protestants they

would face a massive revolt. If they left then, a united Ireland could not be the result.

If there is to be any type of a United Ireland it will be a federal united Ireland. A united Ireland without any special protection for the minority is utterly ridiculous. It will not happen.

I found myself reacting to the point that we are denouncing the oppressed. It is a powerful emotional argument. But we have defended the oppressed! Throughout the 1970s we defended the Provisional IRA. We did it partly because it is difficult to disengage yourself, to see things clearly, in such a conflict.

Nevertheless, this is a trick argument. If the oppressed are the Northern Ireland Catholics, who the hell says that Sinn Fein represents the oppressed? In reality, the bourgeois nationalist SDLP has more than twice the vote of Sinn Fein. If the Catholics are "the oppressed", then John Hume is their main representative, and the demand to uncritically back the oppressed translates into the demand to back John Hume! Who says that we must go from sympathising and siding with the oppressed to agreeing with what Sinn Fein, or John Hume, say and do? It is a trick argument.

I have argued today not as a socialist, but as a republican. I believe that progress in Ireland is only possible by treating all its people equally. As James Connolly said, "Ireland apart from her people means nothing to me."

Finally, about socialism. Sinn Fein talks about a new Ireland.

What does that mean? The only new Ireland that will get the parasites off our backs and stop emigration is an Ireland where the working class has taken power. That Ireland can not come into being without the working class remaking Ireland. The key is to unite the working class. From this point of view the Provisionals must be doubly condemned. The Provisionals have deepened the already existing divisions in the working class.

If this movement ends its military campaign on the basis of accepting that you

can not coerce the Protestants the Provisionals condemn their entire 25 year record. I can understand how people are trapped, and drawn in to what the Provos have been doing. That does not make it anything less than an historical *cul de sac*.

I appeal to those in Sinn Fein who think they are socialists to look at their history. It is a history shaped by mystical pseudo-Republicanism, not by any rational politics, republican or socialist. In practice it is Northern Irish Catholic communalism, wrapped up in inappropriate "Republican" ideas. It has set back the Irish working class, Irish unity, Irish Republicanism and Irish socialism — for a generation.

● Francis Malloy and Sean Matgamna were speaking at the 1994 *Workers' Liberty* summer school.

"We want an intra-Irish solution by agreement between the sections of the Irish people. Sinn Fein want a solution by way of Britain strong-arming the Protestants! Fantasy could not become more fantastical!"

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* See *Workers' Liberty* no 19 for an account of that strike.