Ireland 69-85

Why Militant and IRSP are twins

Editorial: Dialogue yes, ventriloquism no!

Militant's record on Ireland...

... and ours

James Connolly

For a federal united Ireland!

16 years of conflict
Dialogue yes, ventriloquism no

Throughout the '70s, the dominant attitude in the labour movement towards the Provisional IRA and its political partner Sinn Fein was one of hostility and blank incomprehension. 'Sectarian murderers' was the common basic comment. Today everything is changed. Wide layers of the labour movement, and especially the local government Left, say they want a 'dialogue' with Sinn Fein.

So far, so good; but in fact many on the Left are uncritical mouthpieces for the Sinn Fein left wing's views on Irish politics, on Irish history, and on possible solutions to the conflict in Northern Ireland. They function as ventriloquist's dummies rather than independent partners in a dialogue. On balance the whole situation is better than the way things were in the '70s, but it is a long way from working-class politics.

There are two reasons for the change. Many of those now prominent in the Labour Left, and especially in the local government Left, were educated in the minority view of Sinn Fein and the IRA in the '70s. That's the good reason - knowledge and understanding. The bad reason is that the Irish vote is very important. One person in six in London is said to be Irish. In places like Brent and Islington the Irish vote is massive. Ethnic politics has given much to the sudden mushrooming of support for Ireland and for 'dialogue with Sinn Fein'.

Take as an example the much-publicised speech by Ken Livingstone in which he said that Britain had done the equivalent of Hitler's holocaust against the Jews during the Irish potato famine of the 1840s. Good Irish nationalist headline-grabbing stuff. But it's bad history. More than that, and worse, it is middle-class Catholic-nationalist history.

During the potato famine grain was exported from Ireland that could have kept the people alive. Who exported it? Catholic Irish middlemen! One of the worst consequences of the famine was the 'clearances' from the land of 'unwanted' surplus tenants. Who cleared them? In many cases it was Catholic middlemen who had bought out the old landlords after the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849.

The best you can say is that if there had been a national Irish legislature in Dublin it would have done better than the 'United Kingdom' administration. Perhaps. The facts of later 19th and of 20th century Irish life don't bear this supposition out. The Irish capitalists opposed the early welfare state.

Ruling classes, especially weak ruling classes, are not more concerned for or more merciful towards their co-nationals or co-religionists. On the contrary.

The whole notion that the famine was 'English' is Catholic-Irish middle-class propaganda. Back in 1910, 75 years ago, James Connolly analysed, exposed and denounced this middle-class nationalist view of the famine, which contains a massive apologia for the Irish capitalists - the same capitalists who starved the Dublin workers in 1913.

In Britain the Irish workers need class politics - not warmed-up Irish middle-class nationalist politics in the service of ambitious Labour Party local government politicians.

We are for a dialogue with Sinn Fein. But for the Labour Left to mimic the politics of Sinn Fein - inadequate, sectional, narrowly nationalist as they are, with no pretence of either appealing to the Protestant workers or offering them anything other than incorporation as a minority into a Catholic Ireland - can do nobody any good. Least of all can it do good to the Irish workers in Britain, who need especially to be emancipated from the traditional 26-County Fianna-Fail-type nationalism, a slightly radical version of which is promoted
by Sinn Fein.

Habitual fools and fantasists like the publishers of Socialist Action can go on about Sinn Fein being a working-class or — so they sometimes seem to say — a Marxist party. The reality is that Sinn Fein is a Catholic communal organisation, confined to the Catholic community; its socialism is diffuse and ill-defined; its attitude to the majority of the Northern Ireland working class is hostile; its notions of the socialist transformation of society are elitist and militarist. Against this the sociological fact that they have a working-class membership is not decisive. Politically, whatever their good intentions, they are in no sense a working-class organisation.

A dialogue presupposes a viewpoint on each side. The problem with the British Left is that it does not have an independent working-class viewpoint. It needs to develop one.

We hope that this issue of 'Forum' will open a discussion in the British labour movement on Ireland. We invite contributions.
16 years of conflict

FOR four years or so before 1968 Northern Ireland had been shaken up and destabilised. In October 1968 it blew up.

The British Labour government had been openly putting pressure on the Protestant sectarian regime at Stormont to stop being sectarian, to stop discrimination against Catholics, and to stop repressing them. The British government plainly no longer considered the partition of Ireland to be in Britain's interest. It wanted to shed the odium attached to Britain's sectarian back-yard semi-detached state. The prospects ahead were that British and Ireland would both soon join the EEC.

Relations between Britain and the 26 Counties were better than for many years. In 1965 the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement was signed. The British government had the bones of Sir Roger Casement dug up out of their grave at Pentonville Jail, where Casement was buried after they hanged him in 1916, and returned to Ireland with much ceremony, as if symbolically to lay the ghosts of past conflicts. Six County prime minister O'Neill visited Dublin, Taoiseach Sean Lemass visited Belfast.

The Southern Irish economy was in its best shape for a quarter-century. On the surface it seemed to be a time of amicable cooperation, readjustment and rational reconstruction.

The contradiction that changed these prospects so dramatically lay in Northern Ireland itself, which proved beyond the power of Britain — or of Britain and the Southern Irish bourgeoisie together — to control. For 50 years Northern Ireland had been ruled as a "Protestant state for a Protestant people" (long-time Northern Ireland prime minister Lord Brookeborough).

The Catholics were a big and threatening hostile minority of about one in three who had been kept in the Six County state against their will in 1921. Chronic antagonism was therefore built into the Six Counties state. The Protestants repressed the Catholics, organising a special sectarian part-time wing of the police, the D-Specials, to do so.

They built a solid Protestant bloc, involving all classes from slum Protestants to horse Protestants, against the Catholic minority. Partly for political reasons, but also because there was great scarcity and poverty, they systematically discriminated against Catholics.

More Catholics were unemployed than Protestants; run-down areas where unemployment never dropped below the Great Depression level, even during the years of the boom in the '40s, '50s and '60s, tended to be Catholic areas. Politics was largely communal—sectarian politics — Catholic against Protestant. Catholics were cheated of local democracy; the system long discarded in Britain of giving business people one vote for every business premises continued in Northern Ireland, where it hit the poorer Catholic community. Areas with big Catholic majorities — Derry City for example — were blatantly gerrymandered to give the Protestant/Unionist minority control of the local council. Because votes went with houses, Catholic housing was among the worst in Western Europe.

There was systematic anti-Catholic discrimination in employment. The Harland and Wolff shipyard, and the big engineering works, employed practically no Catholics. The Sirocco Engineering Works in East Belfast, standing in the Catholic enclave of the Short Strand where there was 70% unemployment, had four Catholics out of 600 workers in the mid-'70s. As a direct consequence of this, the composition of the trade unions was tilted heavily against the Catholics.

The unions remained united on day-to-day trade unionism, on a basis of tacit acceptance of these discriminatory practices and agreement not to raise political questions concerning the Six Counties' constitution. Trade union unity was unity of the privileged with the oppressed on the terms laid down by the privileged, to defend the status quo in industry and on the question of the Six Counties' constitutional position.
At the top, where prominent people often were leftists or had a left wing past—like, for example, Betty Sinclair, the Stalinist secretary of the Belfast Trades Council—trade unions and trades councils could sometimes be got to pass 'progressive' or liberal resolutions, but these were not representative of the Orange majority of the Northern Ireland labour movement. Unity in the Northern Ireland trade unions was a fragile thing. The threat of a split on the constitutional questions was always present, staved off by political paralysis and tacit agreement to avoid splitting issues.

The situation was the same with the political labour movement. In the '60s the Northern Ireland Labour Party had a socialist left wing in Derry and Belfast. But it was a Unionist, that is, a fundamentally Protestant party. Time and again, throughout its history, it had been disrupted by conflicting positions on "the constitutional question". Always for the status quo, it attempted to broaden its support, sometimes by playing down its own Unionist character, sometimes by trickery. In the '40s, for example, the NILP agitated in the Falls Road under the Irish tricolour, in the Shankill under the Union Jack, and in the city centre under the Red Flag! Inevitably this party fell apart, repeatedly.

The Protestant workers wore a privileged layer. Their privileges were marginal— but nevertheless big privileges. Leon Trotsky once remarked that the greatest possible privilege is to have a crust of bread when everybody else is starving. To have, as part of the Protestant ruling bloc, a considerably better chance of a job amongst mass unemployment, was no small privilege.

Sectarianism was no surface part of Northern Ireland, but basic to it. It was a society flawed right through along the lines of the Catholic and Protestant communities. In the late '60s and early '70s it split vertically along the lines of the communal divide, not horizontally along the lines of class.

This was the problem for Britain's reforming drive in the mid '60s. The upper-class Orange and Unionist leaders were willing to make timid moves towards reform; the Protestant working-class ranks became very alarmed that reform would be at their expense. At first this was a slow process. Around 1966, Ian Paisley, the most vocal representative of that alarm, still seemed an archaic crank. But the first killings occurred in 1966, when a Protestant secret army, the UVF, killed a Catholic farm worker suspected by them of having IRA connections.

Paisley, in his own way, was a radical, voicing the Protestant workers' feelings and distrust of the Unionist establishment who seemed willing to "sell them out" at the behest of the British government. From the mid-'60s there was a strong strain of populist, lower-class discontent in the growing Protestant backlash. Paisley, for example, was the featured speaker at the July celebrations of the Independent Orange Order in 1969, though that organisation had moved a long way since the days, back in 1907, when it helped Jim Larkin forge Protestant and Catholic working-class unity (for a brief while).

But at first, in the mid-'60s, the Protestant backlash was limited, and seemed like it could be easily contained. The Catholic agitation that now got under way to add pressure from below to the British government's pressure for reform from above, turned the Protestant backlash into a powerful mass movement.

The Catholics began to agitate for 'civil rights'—one man (sic) one job, one man one house, one man one vote. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formed in 1967. It was a broad coalition led by Republicans who had renounced the gun—at least for the moment—green nationalist politicians, Stalinists, and socialists of various sorts. Inevitably their demands were taken by the Protestants to be demands to divide up the existing jobs and homes.

It is possible that these 'civil rights' demands could have rendered more palatable to the Protestant workers if expressed in some such way as this: create jobs by building more houses, etc. However, it is not at all certain.

The implications of the Catholic movement went way beyond what they demanded. The fundamental civil right the Catholics lacked was the right of self-determination—the fact that they were an artificial minority within an
artificial state, carved out against the will of the big majority of the people
of Ireland. From that flowed the possibility of discrimination and repression in
the Orange sectarian state. It was not just ultra-sensitive Unionist politicians
like the Stormont Home Secretary William Craig who saw that the logic of any such
mainly-Catholic movement would lead it straight to the question of Northern Ire-
land's constitutional status. And in fact the leaders of the 'Official' Republi-
cans, who were heavily involved in the civil rights agitation, did see it as the
first stage in a mass mobilisation that would, when the time was ripe, raise "the
national question". Protestants tended to see any movement of Catholics as a
threat to "the constitution".

This was the background to the events of October 1968. Home secretary William
Craig banned the civil rights demonstration in Derry, and the police enforced the
ban by baton charges when it was defied. World TV audiences saw the Republican
Labour MP for West Belfast, Gerry Fitt, with blood streaming from a head wound
caused by a police baton. Most importantly, people in Britain saw it.

From that moment on, the Protestant-majority Unionist government at Stormont
was on the defensive. Northern Ireland was world headline news. The pressure for
reform intensified. William Craig was sacked from the Stormont government. The
Protestant working class became increasingly alarmed at the prospect of being
'sold out'. The Protestant backlash grew bigger and began to reflect itself inside
the ruling Unionist Party.

One of the main Northern Ireland responses to the bloody events in Derry was
the creation of a powerful movement of students to agitate for civil rights -
People's Democracy (which should not be confused with the present organisation of
that name, though the two do have some links). PD was based on Queen's University,
Belfast, and initially had many Protestant members. Outraged by
police brutality at home, they were influenced by the world-wide student radicalisa-
tion of that time, which elsewhere focused on organising protests and solidarity
with the Vietnamese against the US army in Vietnam. Most of the leaders of PD were
Marxist socialists.

PD agitated and marched - often very provocatively - for civil rights. The
Orange backlash grew. The Unionist Party went into ferment and crisis. Prime
Minister Terence O'Neill was a feeble politician nurtured in a political system
in which gentry like himself could take the loyalty and deference of the lower
orders for granted. He could not cope.

Central to what happened in the next three years was the incapacity of the
Unionist upper-class elite to carry the Protestant masses with them on reform.
Every Catholic, or pro-Catholic, action, stirred up and agitated the Protestant
ranks, feeding the backlash. The elite could control neither the one nor the
other, and the system was ground to bits between the two. O'Neill resigned in
early 1969, to be replaced by another ex-Army man, his cousin, Chichester-Clark.

In January 1969 police rioted in Derry's Bogside, the Catholic slum area
built outside the walls of the one-time Protestant city of Londonderry. The
Catholics erected barricades to keep them out.

Serious rioting occurred in July. Then in August the upper-class Orange
Order, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, staged a provocative march on the walls
overlooking the Catholic slums. Bitter clashes occurred, which became full-
scale warfare between the police, the sectarian D-Special constables, and
assorted Paisleyites on the one side, and the Catholics of the Bogside on the other.

Barricades were set up, and the Bogsiders held off the forces of the state
using stones and petrol-bombs. Protestant bigots attacked Catholic areas in
West Belfast, and the same thing happened there. The Southern Ireland prime
minister said that the South could not "stand idly by". The Northern Ireland
state seemed about to dissolve into sectarian civil war. On August 13 the
British Army was moved onto the streets to stop the state falling apart. It
quickly took control in Belfast and Derry.
1. Catholics welcomed the Army as saviours — but they didn't take their fades down. The Catholics of Derry and Belfast had seceded from the Irish Ireland state, for the moment. The barricades would stay up, patrolled on the outside by the British Army armed with machine guns and rifles, and on the inside by Catholics armed with hurlers, until the Catholics agreed to take them down in October.

This was the first crucial turning point. The Northern Ireland state had shown itself to be un-reformable. It had been designed to serve the Protestant majority and they had a built-in majority against any change they didn't want. The Labour government had to decide what to do. As well as sending in the army, it sent in a bevy of civil servants to oversee the chief Northern Ireland civil servants, thus seriously curtailing the independence of the Northern Ireland government. That's all the British Labour government did.

Instead of recognising that the system had to be radically dismantled and restructured, it left it essentially in being, tinkering with it. But a process had begun that would end with the abolition of Stormont in March 1972, thus depriving the Protestant majority, whose right to self-determination the Six County state allegedly gives expression to, of the right to exercise that majority in any local political structures. The only majority right they have been allowed to exercise is the right to veto any basic changes.

The events of August-October 1969 set Northern Ireland on a new trajectory, though that was not clear at the time. The youth in the Catholic areas had been roused up and radicalised, and were deflated and disappointed when the barricades came down in October 1969. The crisis in the Unionist Party continued, under pressure on one side from the British government to reform and on the other from the Protestant population against "selling them out" to the Catholics or "Dublin". Chichester-Clark resigned in 1970, to be replaced by the tougher, less genteel, and altogether less offbeat Brian Faulkner.

Paradoxically, this period saw the high point of socialism in Northern Ireland. It is important to be clear about this, because you would never guess it from Militant's strange accounts of recent Irish history, and because it is very important in understanding what has happened since. The Provisional IRA grew in part out of the impotence and self-imposed irrelevance of socialism in Northern Ireland in 1969-70.

Most of the prominent Catholic activists or representatives were socialists — the exceptions were middle-class civil rights people like John Hume, and even they allied with 'socialists' like Gerry Fitt MP and called the party they set up in 1970 the Social Democratic and Labour Party. (Mainly Catholic, it then included some Protestants, like Ivan Cooper MP). PD ceased to be an amorphous student movement in late '69, and started agitating for socialism and on social questions. The PD-associated MP for Mid-Ulster, Bernadette Devlin, elected in 1969, was a revolutionary socialist, who worked closely in Britain with groups like IS/SPW and, briefly, the SLL (WRP). (Today she is hardly distinguishable from a Republican).

All the leading activists in Derry were socialists, with the leading role falling to the Derry Labour Party, led by Eamonn McCann. In Derry almost all the Republicans were socialists, and some were influenced by Trotskyism. Most of these socialists did appeal on a class basis to the Protestant workers, before and after August 1969. Even in its wild and provocative student days, PD appealed to Protestant workers to see that socially they had a common interest with Catholic workers. They all carefully tried to avoid appearing as Catholics or traditional Republicans.

For example, a PD leader, Cyril Toman, who was then a sort of Trotskyist, tried to get a hearing from Protestant workers by flying a Union Jack over his platform! Today Cyril Toman is in Sinn Fein, and in 1983 was one of its Parliamentary candidates.
All the socialists made 'Militant'-style denunciations of the idea that there could be a non-socialist united Ireland. Only in a socialist Ireland could the Protestants' legitimate fears that Home Rule would be Rome Rule be allayed. "Neither Thames nor Tiber", the most Republican of them said, meaning no Irish unification apart from socialism. They roundly abused the "Green Tory" Republic and marched across the border waving illegal condoms in the faces of the 26 County police.

By contrast the Republicans were eclipsed. Shamed and split by their inability to defend the Catholic areas in August 1969, they seemed to count for little — and anyway the main body of Republicans were socialists too.

The high point for socialism was the election of June 1970. The Northern Ireland Labour Party refused to endorse Eamonn McCann as a candidate, and he stood with the backing of the Derry and Coleraine Labour Parties. He advocated troops out and socialism, which he defined as nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, rather like 'Militant' does. McCann got 8,000 votes.

There were lots of socialists, many of them 'Trotskysits' of one sort or another. The problem was that they were largely confined to the Catholic community. Individual Protestants were socialists, of course. Though the big student Protestant support for civil rights fell away very quickly, some stayed — for example, Ronnie Bunting, son of a prominent associate of Ian Paisley, who joined PD and was reputed to be 'Chief of Staff' of the Irish National Liberation Army when he was murdered in 1981. But these were individuals. The Protestant working class remained impervious to appeals.

Sections of it were 'radicalising' and separating off from the traditional Unionist leaders. But they were going to Paisleyism. Their radicalism was diffuse, sectional, fuelled in part by fear of the Catholics in the Six Counties and in a possible united Ireland.

Any class feeling was strictly confined within their communal framework. If they recognised similar people in similar conditions to their own across the communal divide, they did not go on to conclude that there was a common interest. Communism shaped and limited everything. Northern Ireland's society split vertically along communal lines in 1969 and after; and when the Protestant community split horizontally, it had no significance for class politics — it was an affair internal to the Protestant community. That is the basic tragedy of Northern Ireland politics in the last 15 years: that workers' disillusionment with the Orange bosses served only to build the Paisleyite Democratic Unionist Party.

The Catholics and their representatives — in the first place the socialists and did propose working class unity. But they could not impose it on the Protestants, nor even get a dialogue with the Protestants. It is normally thus when an oppressed layer moves, frightening the upper layers.

For example, who can doubt that the US blacks would, given a chance, have chosen unity with the white workers in the '50s and '60s? Unity wasn't on offer on any terms other than the continued subordination of the blacks. The '60s black revolt, with riots and burning cities, followed, 'alienating' white workers. That was tragic, as were the parallel events and relationships in Northern Ireland. But those are poor Marxists who would (or did) therefore conclude that our job was to tell the oppressed patiently to bear their burden.

Many activists agreed that "socialism was the only road", but there can be no socialism without the working class — in this case, crucially, the Protestant working class — so that road was not open.

The consequence for the radicalised Catholic youth was isolation from the main body of the working class and working-class movement — and impotence. The ground was prepared for the Provisionals' campaign by the impotence, and by the attempts of the socialists to avoid the national question.
As we saw, all the socialists, including the socialist Republicans, steered clear of the national question or renounced it (some of the Republicans hypocritically, tactically). That left the national question and 'anti-imperialism' entirely in the hands of the Provisional - initially, right-wing - Republicans.

Cyril Toman - the Marxist of '69, waving his Union Jack at Protestant workers so that they would let him talk to them about socialism, who became the Sinn Fein candidate of '83 - symbolises and sums up this tragic experience.

The Republican movement had come out of World War 2, in which it had allied with Germany, pulverised and seemingly defunct. It made a principle of physical force and of boycotting the various parliaments (Dublin, Belfast, London), and apart from that was 'non-political'. In fact it reflected the right-wing cold-war atmosphere of Catholic Ireland in the '40s and '50s. It revived slowly in the post-war period, and in 1956 launched a military campaign of small guerilla actions on the Border. This soon petered out and eventually, in 1962, a formal 'ceasefire' was declared.

Trying to learn from their experience, some of the leading activists turned 'left', and began to talk of using social agitation to gain support for 'the national struggle'. They drew on half-forgetten experiences of left-wing Republicanism in the '30s, when left-moving traditional Republicans met the right-moving Stalinised Communist Party of Ireland, and together they created a sort of populist Republicanism. The immediate task was to win national independence ('the Republic'; for the Stalinists, 'the bourgeois-democratic revolution'); then socialism would come at the next stage. In the '60s, too, the leftward-moving Republicans met Stalinists and were influenced by them, in the first place by Dr Roy Johnstone, who went onto the Army Council.

One product of the Republicans' turn to social questions was that they became involved in the civil rights movement. They began to disarm the IRA, expelling dissidents, benefiting from the dropping-away of many traditional activists.

The events of August 1969 changed the direction of the IRA too. They were largely irrelevant during the fighting, the 'Chief of Staff' Goulding being reduced to making idle public threats. Militants were told that the problem was that the IRA had lent its guns to the Free Wales Army!

In December 1969 and January 1970 the Republican movement split. The breakaways were traditionalists. Many, like David O'Connell, were veterans of what little action there had been in the '50s. Others, like Joe Cahill - sentenced to death but reprieved because of his age, while 19-year old Tom Williams was hanged, in 1942 - went back even further. They denounced the 'communism' of the mainstream Republicans, though they too called themselves socialists - democratic socialists. The Provisionals' prospects did not seem very bright: for example, J. Bowyer Bell, the author of a learned academic study of the IRA published in 1970, dismissed them as a moribund relic of the past who could not keep up with the development of the mainstream.

In fact the Provos grew with astonishing speed. They recruited rapidly from the disillusioned Catholic youth.

Fianna Fail money helped launched the Provos, but to explain the development of their movement as a result of ruling-class divide-and-rule is self-evident inadequate, and no more than a conspiracy theory of history. As well to explain the Russian Revolution as a German plot because the German general staff allowed Lenin to cross Germany in a sealed train, Fianna Fail wanted to split and stop the left-wing Republican movement. They did not want what the Provos very rapidly became.

Eamonn McCann has described the Provos' appeal like this. Whereas everyone talked about socialism and 'imperialism', but had nothing to suggest doing about it in the circumstances, the Provos could point to the British soldier standing at the local street corner and say: 'There, that's imperialism. Shoot it.'
The determined avoidance of the national question by the Left and the official Republicans—who consigned it to the distant future, together with a socialism that had to wait on the Protestant workers—ensured that the national question, which lay at the heart of the subordinate and oppressed position of the Catholics, was raised, when it inevitably forced its way to the front, in the Provos' initially right-wing version. The Provos could of course also draw on the Catholic-Republican culture—songs, history, ingrained loyalties—with which the Catholic community was saturated. In late '69 a staunch old-style Republican like ex-internee Sean Keenan seemed a respected anachronism: within a year or 18 months, people like that were the centre of a powerful movement which had taken in many of the radicalised youth eager to 'shoot imperialism'. One consequence of this was that the Provisional Republican movement would itself become radicalised, especially in Belfast and Derry—though its radicalism was within the limits of one community.

By early 1970 relations between the British Army and the Catholics had deteriorated badly. The sort of reforms the civil rights movement had called for had quickly been rushed through after August 1969. The B-Specials were disbanded, the RUC disarmed. But things had gone too far. These measures—especially the disbandment of the B-Specials—alarmed the Protestants but failed to satisfy the Catholics.

The army was a crude and brutal tool for police work. Balancing between the communities, it inevitably began to reflect the real balance of the Six County state—which favours the Protestants. The election of a Tory government in June 1970 replaced a Labour government which had learned to have some sensitivity towards the feelings of the Catholics with Tories whose Parliamentary allies were the Unionists of Northern Ireland.

A major turning-point in Army/Catholic relations came in July 1970. Protestants attacked a Catholic church in the Lower Falls and the Official IRA shot three of them dead. The Army, perhaps to placate Protestant anger and 'keep the balance', then declared a curfew on the Lower Falls and a systematic search of the area for arms. Bloody clashes followed with the Official IRA.

In the following year things deteriorated very rapidly, the Provisionals picking up strength all the while. Clashes between Catholic youth and the army became normal and so did the saturation-level use of CS gas by the army in the Catholic areas. The alienation was massive.

In early 1971 the Provisional IRA killed three British soldiers and things began to move towards a military-style confrontation. But it was still limited. The decisive turn came on August 9 1971, with the introduction of internment. Few IRA men were rounded up, but various political opponents of the Faulkner Stormont government were, like PD leader Michael Farrell. If they had wanted to give the allegiance of the Catholic community to the two IRAs, then Faulkner and Tory prime minister Edward Heath could not have made a better job of it. Now it became a full-scale Catholic insurrection, with the Provisional IRA gaining more support. Bombings and killings escalated enormously. So did the Protestant backlash.

The Protestant UDA was founded in late '71 and became a mass movement of perhaps 50,000 by mid-'72.

This phase ended in March 1972, when the Tory government decided to destroy the 52-year-old sectarian structures of Northern Ireland and start again. Stornmont was abolished. The IRA had gained a tremendous victory. Everything seemed to be in the melting pot—and it was. ½ million Protestant workers struck in protest.

The Provos' military campaign deepened and widened the gap between Protestants and Catholics. It did not create it. In terms of basic cause and effect, the Provos and their campaign were a product of the Catholic/Protestant division which had rendered impotent the Catholic radicals in 1969 and afterwards.
Everything was in the melting pot — but only within the given Northern Ireland framework. The Tories acted more vigorously and radically than Labour had, but they were even less inclined than Labour to face the fact that Northern Ireland was a failed entity, in a state of latent or incipient civil war — increasingly ungovernable.

In 1972 Protestant barricades went up throughout Belfast. Catholic barricades had gone up again in Belfast and Derry after "Bloody Sunday" — January 30, when the British Army shot and killed 14 unarmed Catholics taking part in a banned Republican demonstration in Derry.

The Provisional IRA declared a ceasefire in mid-'72, and the mighty British government decided to negotiate with them. Republican and Loyalist prisoners were given special political prisoner status. Provisional IRA leaders among them Gerry Adams, now MP for West Belfast — were flown to London for discussions. Nothing came of it all. The British were willing to change the way Northern Ireland was run, but not to change Northern Ireland. The armed mass movement of the Protestants paralysed any impulses they may have had to make basic changes. They stuck to their commitment to maintain the Six County state. And that meant balancing between the communities.

This balancing led to a breakdown of the truce with the IRA. Many hundreds of Catholics had been made homeless by sectarian intimidation, but when an attempt was made to re-house them in houses vacated by Protestants the Army intervened with a heavy hand to stop it, and the Provisional IRA went back to the gun. An Official IRA ceasefire in the same period remained in being, and still does.

Northern Ireland had never been closer to open communal civil war than in mid '72. Civil war didn't come. Instead there occurred a hurricane of sectarian assassinations, mostly of Catholics by Protestants, which continued through to 1974 and beyond. The British government placated the Protestants by forcibly taking down the Catholic barricades in July '72. Tension eased. The war between the British Army and the Provisional IRA resumed fiercely. IRA bombs continued to blast the centres of Northern Ireland's cities.

Britain now moved energetically to re-erect a self-governing system in Northern Ireland, calling on the aid of the Southern Irish government. A series of talks, with Unionist and Catholic politicians and with the Southern Irish government, culminated in the 'Sunningdale Agreement' on a new system in Northern Ireland. The new system would have institutionalised power-sharing in the Six Counties and a loose and rather powerless 'Council of Ireland' would take account of Northern Ireland Catholics' desire for Irish unity. Britain promised a referendum to determine whether the Northern Ireland majority wanted Irish unity. (The referendum was held in March 1973: of course, the majority did not want unity).

The old Unionist Party, for 50 years Northern Ireland's monolithic ruling party, had broken up in 1972. Now the Unionists fragmented further. The Paisleyites — now very much more than a fringe group — and William Craig's 'Vanguard' were marching and drilling and making blood-curdling threats, while some of their followers were slaughtering individual Catholics at random. The Unionists divided into those willing to work the new system Britain wanted and those who were either against it or thought it could not be carried with the Protestant masses. On the Catholic side, the pro-power-sharing SDLP had the electoral support of the mass of Catholics: Sinn Fein was not allowed to stand in the elections for the new Assembly.

On January 1 1974 the new power-sharing executive came into being. It was a coalition of a Unionist minority, led by Brian Faulkner; the SDLP; and some tiny parties like the non-sectarian liberal Unionists, Alliance, and the no less Unionist Northern Ireland Labour Party. The Paisleyites and other die-hard bigots were ghettoised, accounting for about one-third of the Assembly. They shouted, rioted and disrupted the work of the Assembly. To no avail. Though the Faulkner-
ites were under tremendous pressure and had broken election pledges against power-sharing, the SDLP-Faulknerite alliance held and began to get a grip on Northern Ireland. A dramatic shift had occurred, for the stable mainstay of this regime was the SDLP. Britain had shifted its weight heavily onto the middle-class Catholic party. The die-hard Orangemen appeared isolated and impotent. There was reason to think that massive government patronage and a vigorous reform policy – for which Britain had the resources and the will to pay – would gradually rally a sizeable Protestant support around the Faulknerites. The power-sharing executive seemed to have years of life ahead of it. The IRA was still active but it seemed to be in decline.

But now the British class struggle intervened. In February 1974 the British Tory government called an election on the issue, 'Who rules, the unions or the government?', hoping thereby to gain the political and moral authority they needed to defeat the British miners. Heath lost the election. In Northern Ireland what was lost was the entire government strategy.

The Westminster election took the die-hard Orange politicians out of the Stormont ghetto in which they had been confined; it forced Brian Faulkner's party to face the Orange electorate they had tricked in the Northern Ireland election six months before. The result was a catastrophe for power-sharing. Of 12 Northern Ireland Westminster seats, no less than 11 were won by opponents of power-sharing (the other was Gerry Pitt's). The moral authority of the power-sharing executive was undermined. It staggered on until May 1974, when a majority vote in favour ofactivating the Council of Ireland provision triggered a powerful general strike.

The Unionists had already used their industrial muscle on a number of occasions. In early 1971 thousands of Harland and Wolff shipyard workers had marched to demand that internment for suspected Republicans be introduced. In March 1972 a quarter of a million struck when Stormont was abolished. (To get an equivalent British figure you would have to multiply by either 60 or 40 – depending on whether you take the strikers as a proportion of the Protestant population or of the whole Six County population – to get 15 or 10 million!)

Now, in May 1974, there was a full-scale general strike. Intimidation by the UDA was used to get it going – but it soon became clear that it had real support. It was a revolutionary general strike – for utterly reactionary objectives. The strikers were against the power-sharing executive and the Council of Ireland and for a restoration of 'majority rule' in the Six Counties – that is, Protestant rule. The official Northern Ireland trade unions attempted to fight the reactionary strike and, protected by the Army, organised a march back to work. Only a handful of people turned up, taking their lives in their hands to walk behind TUC secretary Len Murray and local trade union leaders. It was a fiasco. Nobody who knew the Northern Ireland labour movement would have expected anything else when the official unions came into conflict with their Protestant rank and file. The British Army was powerless and, maybe, the officers did not want to act against the strike. For two weeks the Faulknerites resigned and the power-sharing executive collapsed.

It was the decisive turning point for the period which opened with the abolition of the old Protestant home rule Parliament in March 1972. The British government had approved unable to face down the Protestants and had allowed its entire strategy of political reconstruction to be shattered. What now? The Labour government refused to admit that this strategy was in ruins. It announced that there would be new elections for a Northern Ireland assembly. This time its function would be to work out a political system for the province acceptable to both Catholics and Protestants on the basis of some sort of power-sharing. Elections were duly held, and the Faulknerites, the moderate, compromising Unionists willing to work the system Britain wanted, were massacred. There followed a full year of discussion, bargaining, demonstrating, posturing and manoeuvring in the Convention. Spectacular shifts took place, for example when
William Craig - the man scapegrated by O'Neill for the batoning of peaceful demonstrators in October 1968, the founder of 'Vanguard' and associate of the Protestant paramilitaries - came out for a variant of power-sharing. He was immediately disowned by his supporters. No deal was possible. The canny politicians who might be willing to try didn't dare - and had they dared then they like Craig would have been repudiated.

The Protestants had won victory in May 1974 - and they wanted victory in the Convention. There was widespread fear in the Catholic community that the Protestant majority would organise some sort of political coup, declaring a new government, and set a train of events in motion which would trigger sectarian civil war. For most of 1975 the Provisional IRA observed a ceasefire. Finally, early in 1976, the Convention sent a report to London which demanded majority rule, not power-sharing, and the British government dissolved the Convention. The outcome had been a foregone conclusion. The British government was stuck with direct rule. The only political structure that could be set up in Northern Ireland would correspond with the nature of Northern Ireland - with its built-in artificial Protestant majority. This put Britain in the absurd position of justifying the Northern Ireland entity and Partition in terms of defending the democratic rights of the Protestant majority while it was forced to deny the Protestant majority the exercise of its majority rights in that Northern Ireland unit!

But logic didn't come into it. The British government sought the line of least resistance, and after the Orange general strike that meant leaning heavily against the Catholics. The IRA was badly affected by the truces of 1975 - but it was still a force to be reckoned with and now it began to reorganise.

Britain's policy now was signalled early in 1976 when the Labour minister responsible for Northern Ireland, Roy Mason, announced that from now on convicted Republican and Loyalist activists would no longer have the special status or prison regime they had had since 1972. This was the 'criminalisation' policy. Inevitably it bore down far more heavily on the Catholics than the Protestants. At the same time the war against the IRA became an intensive war against the people of the Catholic ghettos of Derry and Belfast. Thousands of Catholic homes were repeatedly searched and wrecked by the British army. Mason's policy was to sit tight, beat down the Catholics, and make neither attempt nor pretence at any new political initiative. Northern Ireland would be forced to 'sweat out' its sickness. For quite a while it seemed to be working. The IRA was in serious decline; the flesh fell off Protestant organisations like the UDA and they shrivelled up into not much more than racketeering gangs. Bombings and killings became somewhat less frequent.

When in 1977 an attempt was made by Ian Paisley to get a new Orange general strike over 'security' it flopped. The majority of Protestant workers no longer felt under immediate and intense threat. They didn't respond, and since not enough of them could be coerced, the second Orange 'general' strike was a fiasco. It had more to do with the jockeying for position among Loyalist politicians than with anything else.

But the convulsions were not over - the processes were just hidden from view. The Provisional IRA reorganised itself on a tighter cell structure and geared itself towards what its strategists talked of as a 20 year war. Developments were germinating in the prison camps and jails that would allow the IRA to gain an unprecedented position of political dominance in the Catholic community.

For the Republicans did not accept Mason's criminalisation policy. Those convicted after the new rules came into force in early 1976 refused to comply with prison regulations. They refused to wear prison uniform, wearing blankets instead. Mason's criminalisation policy opened one of the most terrible battles ever fought for their own dignity and political principles by political prisoners confronting a brutal and soulless prison system designed to degrade and
demoralise them. Republican prisoners spent years 'on the blanket'. Some served out entire sentences and were released without ever wearing prison clothes. Slowly support built up outside, but it was never enough to have any effect.

The turning point came with the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981. The hunger strike of 1980 was called off before anyone died, the Republicans thinking that they had been promised changes. They hadn't. A new hunger strike started in spring 1981, led by Bobby Sands, officer commanding the Provisional IRA prisoners at Long Kesh. While on hunger strike, Sands was elected MP for Fermanagh-S. Tyrone, and it was Bobby Sands MP whom Mrs Thatcher allowed to starve to death in Long Kesh. World-wide attention was now on Long Kesh. Support for the hunger strikers grew rapidly in the Northern Ireland Catholic community. It was a sign of the times that the SDLP did not dare stand against Sands and, by splitting the Catholic vote, deprive the Provisional IRA of a great propaganda boost. Sands was the first to die and nine others followed him. Like the execution of the 15 captured leaders of the 1916 Rising, the slow and terrible deaths of the ten young Republicans in 1981 had a profound effect on Catholic Ireland.

As coffin after coffin came out of the gates of Long Kesh, the Provisionals gained massive support. They easily won the by-election caused by Bobby Sands' death, in mid 1981. On the other side of the Northern Ireland divide, Protestants reacted with great hostility to the giant Catholic funeral marches and to the very successful propaganda campaign mounted by the Republicans and their supporters. Communal tension became drum-tight.

The hunger strike ended in defeat. Would the support that the sacrifice of the hunger strikers had won for the Provisional IRA survive the end of the hunger strikes? They had had such support before. They had never been able to consolidate it or put it to any use. By now, however, they had learned some important lessons. Things had changed in the Republican movement.

The right-wing Provisional IRA had been steadily radicalised throughout the 1970s. The working-class Republicans in Belfast and Derry were always more radical than the typical petty-bourgeois Sinn Fein supporters in the South. Steadily their influence grew. They talked of socialism with some conviction - though, unfortunately, without much clear definition, and, worse, as if it could be an affair of the Catholic community alone. One 'lesson' the left-wing Republicans in the Northern cities learned in the '70s was to give up on the Protestant workers. Side by side with their radicalisation went a more and more clear sectarianism - though in implication rather than intention - towards the Protestants. Arguably, much that they did was always sectarian. But the old guard paid at least lip service to the ideas and goals of traditional Irish Republicanism, which proudly insisted that the whole people of Ireland were the Irish nation, whatever their origins or creed. The 1972 Provisional IRA policy for a federal Ireland with a nine-county Ulster - adopted when it looked like they would soon win - was preposterous in some of its details but it contained the core idea of conciliating the Protestants. The most clear-cut expression of the sectarianism entwined with the radicalisation of the Northern Provisionals was their hostility to 'federalism', which they removed from Sinn Fein's constitution in 1981-2. The Protestants must either be conciliated, or you try to conquer them: and without federalism and the possibility of autonomy, all that the Provos now offered the Protestants was incorporation as a minority in a heavily Catholic Ireland. The dilemma of the Provisionals parallels that of the Republican socialists in 1968-70: they are a one-community movement, cut off from the majority of the Northern Ireland working class. They know it is the opposition of the Protestants - and specifically of the Protestant working class - that mainly stands in their way. Whereas the socialists of 1968-70 abjured, ignored or renounced the national question, the Provo radicals start from it and now they have an ill-defined socialism which abjures the majority of the Northern Ireland working class. The Provos of today, like the socialists of 1968-70, are therefore impotent to change Northern Ireland, or Ireland.

But the Provisionals are a powerful force in the Catholic community. They learned from the hunger strike the value of politics, and have systematically
turned to electioneering. Since 1982 they have consolidated a seemingly stable Catholic vote of not too far short of 50%. They define their new strategy as a combination of the ballot box and the gun - 'the Armalite in one hand, and a ballot paper in the other'. They aim to make politics, and social agitation, serve the armed struggle. The SDLP was helped mightily by British favour in the early and mid '70s; it has wasted and cracked in the political wilderness, since 1976, shedding its odd socialists and Protestants, to become little more than a green nationalist party. The Provisionals are challenging the weakened SDLP for the position of majority representative of the Catholic community.

What is happening politically in the Catholic community now parallels the political polarisation and differentiation that occurred within Unionism at the beginning of the '70s. The Provos' enforced or voluntary abstention from political action slowed down that process in the Catholic community and allowed the SDLP a virtual monopoly of Catholic politics for a time. No more - the weakening of the SDLP, put out to starve in the no-politics wilderness after 1976, and the Provisionals' own turn to politics, has put an end to that. It is unlikely, however, that the Provisionals will politically annihilate the SDLP, and there is probably still much opposition inside the Provisionals to 'politics'.

Overall, the results of 16 years of turmoil are not encouraging from a working-class point of view. A chasm deep and wide divides the Protestant and Catholic workers. Bitterness which will in the best circumstances take a generation or two to heal has been built up.

The massive collapse of Northern Ireland's industry in the '70s and '80s has hit primarily at Protestant workers, wiping out much of their privileges in employment. Despite severe crises in the South, since the '60s industry there has grown relatively fast, so that the social contrast between North and South - which at the time of Partition was a stark division between a relatively advanced industrial North and an impoverished mostly agricultural South - is greatly diminished. All this, however, has not generated a common feeling of working-class identity across the communal divide. It would be a miracle if it did.

Northern Ireland continues in a state of latent civil war. The British Army keeps the communities apart, but within a strategic British framework of maintaining the artificial sectarian state which keeps the Catholic-Protestant antagonism at near boiling point. Fundamentally the British Army is not a peace-keeper, but the military scaffolding erected to shore up the Six County state when it began to collapse into sectarian chaos in 1969 - in other words, to shore up the framework for the chronic communal antagonism. It keeps the communities apart by beating down the rebellious Catholics.

Britain's policy of holding the ring in Northern Ireland, tinkering occasionally with the political structures and beating down the Catholics as the staple activity, is stoking the fires of latent civil war. It maintains, just below boiling point, the conditions that could well develop into a Lebanese-style civil war in Northern Ireland, with mass communal slaughter and bloody reparation at the end of it.

The only way out of this situation is to recast the entire framework. The sectarian Northern Ireland state must be replaced by a broader framework within which the Catholic and Protestant communities can learn to live together. The Labour Party should commit itself to abolish the Six County sectarian state and to work for a federal united Ireland that will offer the fullest rights, guarantees and autonomy for the Protestant population that are compatible with the rights of the majority of the Irish people.
Why Militant and IRSP are twins

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.

Trade union unity is possible in struggles like the NABS dispute of 1982. But there is no way that such unity can open the way to solid political working-class unity in the sectarian Six County entity. Even spectacular examples of Protestant/Catholic working-class unity have proved to be mere episodes.

For example, 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 Counties election, talked recently about his experiences 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 (he ended up a Unionist).

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 existed. 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 8,000 votes on a revolutionary socialist platform 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 States 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 working-class unity.

The inescapable conclusion from history is that general political unity cannot be created 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.

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 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 trade-union battles 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. Its version of 'socialism' is bureaucratic, statist, and somewhat 1930s--Fabian. As James Connolly put it, "State ownership and control is not necessarily socialist -- if it were, then the army and the navy, the police, the judges, the gaolers, the informers and the hangmen would all be socialist functionaries as they are all state officials... To the cry of the middle-class reformers, 'Make this or that the property of the government', we reply -- 'yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property'." But even if Militant's conception of socialism were more revolutionary, there would still be a problem. In between sub-political industrial issues, and the political maximum, the socialist revolution, they leave 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 to 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. It is a vicious circle: there can be no socialism without the working class, but the working class is deeply divided. To offer 'socialism' as the solution to this division is simply to restate the problem, not to give an answer.

From this general approach has flowed Militant's record over the last 16 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 which 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 (or at least the mass, 50,000-strong, UDA of 1972 was) 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. It pretends that socialism can be the cure for divisions whose healing is the precondition for socialism in Ireland.

Militant's policy 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 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 Irish Republican Socialist Party (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.

In relation to the problem of a divided working class, the solutions of Militant and the IRSP parallel each other. The IRSP tries to substitute for the working class. Militant pretends that the working class in Northern Ireland is other than it is, and relates its calls for a socialist solution to a Northern Ireland working class that exists only in the heads of Militant's leaders.

It is very easy for 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-Republicans or sectarian socialists, or to consider the latter beyond legitimate discussion. Such a conclusion would amount to denying to British, and even to Irish, socialists, the right to any independent judgment on the issues.

Militant's record on Ireland...

Militant has a record on Ireland unique on the British Left. Since 1968 it has argued for working-class unity and immediate socialism as the answer to the conflicts in Northern Ireland. Support for working class unity is not unique to Militant, nor is the idea that socialism is desirable in Ireland, as everywhere else. What is unique is that Militant says: 'unity now and socialism now', and counterposes more or less general and timeless propaganda for workers' unity and socialism to all partial struggles and particularly to the struggles of the oppressed Catholic minority.

To the problem of communal divisions in the working class, its answer is that the workers should be united. To the problem that the different working-class communities are mobilised around national and communal issues, its answer is that they should be mobilised for socialism. Militant steadfastly refuses to address the situation more concretely or seriously.

For 16 years Militant has stubbornly refused to acknowledge the bitter facts about Northern Ireland.

The unions in Northern Ireland organise a workforce much of which has long been selected on a basis of sectarian job preference for Protestants, and therefore the sectarian divisions are internalised in the unions. Irrelevant, says Militant. Chronic working-class division inevitably paralyses the trade unions, and they would split wide open if they tried to engage in politics in conditions where different sections of their members give radically different answers to the question of Northern Ireland's relationship to Britain and the South of Ireland. Not so, says Militant: the trade unions have Catholic and Protestant members, and therefore they are non-sectarian. They can rise above the little political questions that convulse the Six Counties and lead a united Protestant/Catholic working class to socialism.

The workers of the two communities actively or passively support their own paramilitary organisations. No, says Militant. The paramilitaries are tiny grouplets suspended in mid-air. Anyway, if the labour movement were to create a workers' defence force, the workers would support that.

For 15 years Northern Ireland has been torn apart by what the Catholics see as 'the national question'. What answer do Marxists offer to this problem in its peculiar Irish complexities? Socialism is the only answer, says Militant.

An internationalist would say that the problem in Ireland is a problem of how the Irish minority — the Protestants — can relate to the majority without becoming an oppressed group; and that this basic problem has been snarled up and made septic by the interaction of the Protestant minority with Britain, because they have 'solved' the Irish minority problem by imprisoning within the murderously narrow and artificial Six County state a Catholic minority proportionately bigger than the Protestants would be in a united Ireland. A Marxist internationalist would at least ask the question: does not the Bolshevik teaching that wherever such problems exist we advocate a radical democratic solution, involving maximum autonomy for oppressed or potentially
oppressed communities, nations, fragments of nations, or national minorities, apply? What does Militant say to that? Socialism is the only answer — and anything less is treason to socialism.

Now the elitist armed groups like the Provisional IRA and INLA, much denounced by Militant, can talk about socialism irrespective of the state of the working class, and even against the majority of the working class, without being untrue to themselves. But for Marxists to talk about a socialist solution as the immediate answer to chronic and acute communal division within the working class, whose unity is an irreplaceable precondition for socialism, is nonsense.

For 16 years Militant has advocated 'solutions' for Northern Ireland that just could not happen in the circumstances. It has proposed ideas that are not a guide to any meaningful action, but only consoling phrases, ideological boozes. The answer, it says, to the paralysis of the trade unions, is for them immediately to act for socialism and to create a workers' defence force. Until 1974 it advocated the same 'solution' through the agency of the Unionist Northern Ireland Labour Party. Such proposals cannot conceivably bring the 'socialism now' which is supposed to be the 'only solution'; nor can they conceivably assist in doing what can possibly be done in a positive way towards workers' unity and socialism.

Militant's key ideas, summarised above, have been a broad fixed framework within which, over 16 years, it has had a rich and varied series of notions and speculations.

In 1969, it speculated, fantastically, about the prospects for a pioneering socialist society in... the Six Counties unit!

"If the demands of minimum wage; equal pay; crash building programme; take-over big building companies; improved social services are pressed home in action, it can be linked up to the demand for the taking over of the big monopolies and the establishment of a democratic socialist society — which would have immediate repercussions in the South, in Britain, and internationally..." (Militant, May 1969).

Then, responding to the slaughter of 14 Catholics by the British Army in January 1972, Militant waxed eloquent about... organising the British Army for socialism.

"A campaign of individual assassinations... of the British soldiers can only provide excuse for further repression... Also, it can only reinforce the hostility of the ordinary soldier to the Catholic population... Rank and file soldiers could be appealed to on a class basis and won away from the army brass, if a clear socialist alternative was given to them..." (Militant, February 4 1972).

Faced with what looked like civil war in mid-'72, Peter Taaffe wrote this:

"But, given the failure of the trade union leadership to initiate a trade union defence force, every working class area must have the right to defend itself" (Militant no.113, July 1972).

You're on your own, boys! In fact this was to give the seal of Militant's approval to the UDA. It should be remembered that it was the Catholics who were likely to need defending if it came to all-out war.

This July 1972 article was unique in Militant, in that it recognised that there might be some problems in the trade unions.

"We still believe that this workers' defence force could be realised, even at this eleventh hour, despite the relative animosity which has also now affected the trade unions..."
Mostly Militant has stuck stubbornly to the 'trade union defence force' demand, as though the communal clashes against which defence must be organised were in a different world from the trade unions. But occasionally it makes strange sallies. Though venting its implacable hostility to the Provisional IRA, Militant could nevertheless in 1972 make a strange 'call' on the Catholic leaders — including the Provisionals — to create a party of labour!

"Much of the onus for building the party of Labour is today on those in the vanguard of the struggle, the leaders of the Catholic workers. Were these people to direct their energies towards the organised labour movement they could pave the way for united action with their Protestant fellow workers", (Militant no.118, August 18 1972).

It should be added that the leader of the Northern Ireland Labour Party component in this ecumenical front, David Bleakley, had been in the government that brought in internment against Catholics — and only against Catholics — in August 1971.

At the same time Militant speculated about the processes going on in the UDA that would produce class consciousness.

"The development of the UDA with its veneer of class consciousness shows that Protestants are well aware of their class position..." (ibid.)

And during the Orange general strike of 1974 Militant opposed any action by the Labour government to break the reactionary — and even racist — strike, thus telling British workers that the strike was entitled to be treated as a working class action, if not quite a proper or normal one.

In 1980–1 Militant opposed the granting of political status to the Republican hunger strikers.

These are just a few examples of the nonsense that has grown up, at various turning points, under the umbrella of Militant's general ideas. There are many others than could be cited.

This is the record of a tendency that, on Northern Ireland, has not dealt in real politics. It has made socialist propaganda, either very abstract propaganda (but presented as if it is an immediate answer to specific issues) or propaganda in which the socialist messagae is tied tightly to absurd but supposedly practical proposals.

An example of the latter is its often-repeated proposal for a conference of Northern Ireland trade unions and others to launch a Party of Labour which could nationalise the commanding heights of the economy, etc., and thereby solve every problem, including sectarian divisions in the working class. Think about it. Trade unionists in Northern Ireland vote Tory-Unionist or Catholic-Nationalist. A truly representative conference of the trade unions would be at a more backward stage than were the trade unions which founded the British Labour Party in 1900 — and they were at best Liberal. Such a party in Northern Ireland would need time to evolve and develop. But what would Militant do at such a conference, faced with the trade unions as they are, far from socialism?

Would it do what the sectarian British Marxists, the SIF, did in 1901, that is, move a resolution with a full socialist programme and walk out when it was rejected (as it inevitably would be)? Perhaps not. But then it would accept that the conference could not produce the miracle results claimed for it. In fact it is a certainty that such a conference could not lead to anything like Militant's 'socialist solution' in the short or medium term.

Militant, in essence, has had no policy for Ireland — only timeless propaganda, linked to more-or-less bizarre and in the circumstances impossible 'practical' proposals. What distinguishes Militant on Ireland is not the desire for workers' unity and socialism, which it shares with all socialists, but its stubborn refusal to face the facts about Northern Ireland. For working-class Marxists the facts, not fantasies and wishes, are the necessary starting point.
Socialist Organiser traces its attitude on Ireland back to the small group that produced the journal An Solas/Workers Republic in 1966-7, under the umbrella of the Irish Workers Group.

We believed that traditional Republicanism was not and could not be a consistently anti-imperialist force; that it was, by its ideas, goals and methods, a petty-bourgeois movement; that its petty-bourgeois nationalism was a barrier to working-class unity; that its 'little Irelandism' cut in the opposite direction to the interests of the Irish working class.

We believed - in the mid-'60s - that the adoption of a socialist coloration and the brand name 'Connolly socialism' by that movement was not progressive, but confusing, and could only produce a populist mish-mash like the Russian Socialist- Revolutionary Party.

"... the IRA is just not revolutionary in relation to the objective needs of the only possible Irish Revolution.

The same is no less true if 'left' slogans are grafted onto the old base, and a nominal 'For Connolly's Workers' Republic' pinned to the masthead. Such talk of a socialist programme, a Bolshevik party, a workers' republic, demands a proper appreciation of the relationship between the party and the working class... It demands a sharply critical approach to the traditional republican conceptions of revolutionary activity. Otherwise these slogans combined with a largely military idea of the struggle against imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie, will produce not a revolutionary Marxist party, but an abortion similar to the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia, against which the Bolsheviks fought bitterly".

We believed that though there was national oppression - especially and directly against the Northern Ireland Catholics - this was in part the product of a split in the Irish bourgeoisie, and not simply a matter of 'British-occupied Ireland'.

"A division of the Irish bourgeoisie, originating in economic differences, led to a split which was then manipulated by British imperialism, according to its practice of divide and rule. The Northern section, having a measure of political autonomy, kept close links with this imperialism; the Southern section being dominated according to the logic of modern imperialism (i.e. economic weight within more or less free market relations).

In maintaining their closer links with Britain, the Northern capitalists were aided by British troops, who also assist in holding sufficient people to make the state viable. Despite this, talk of 'British-occupied Ireland' obscures the real identity of the garrison in Ireland... the Northern Ireland bourgeoisie".

(Editors of 'Irish Militant', paper of the IWG, February 1967. Irish Militant was loosely associated with the British Militant until about 1966 and thereafter had no connection with it).

Basing ourselves on Lenin's 'Imperialism' and such documents of the Communist International as the 'Theses on the National and Colonial Question' (1920) we believed that the economic domination over Ireland by Britain and other great powers could not be eliminated except by the reorganisation of the world economy through the international socialist revolution.

"The IWG stands against the divided Irish bourgeoisie, Green, Orange, and
Green-White-and-Orange, and for the revolutionary unity of the workers of all Ireland in a struggle for state power...

We stand for the revolutionary combat against imperialism and national oppression in every form, whether that of garrison-imperialism, neo-colonialism, or the glaring economic domination of the small nations by the super-powers which is inevitable where the capitalist world market remains as the sole regulator of relationships. But we denounce those who, in the name of 'Republicanism' and 'anti-imperialism', attempt to subordinate the working class to any section of the bourgeoisie, and who counterpose a defunct petty-bourgeois nationalist narrow-mindedness to the socialist struggle of the workers for power. National unity will be achieved, if not by the coming together of the Irish capitalist class under the auspices of the British imperialist state and the capitalist drive towards West European federation, then as an incidental in the proletarian revolution.

The possibility of any other revolutionary reunification is long since past. The only revolutionary Republicanism is the internationalist socialist Republicanism of the proletariat".

('Towards an Irish October', Preamble to the Constitution of the ING).

We thought that the nationalist (left and right) focus on gaining 'real' independence was both meaningless for the 26 Counties and confusing from the point of view of the working class. We rejected economic nationalism as being no more than the discarded and discredited former economic policy of the 26 County bourgeoisie (1932-58). It was a reactionary petty-bourgeois programme counterposed to the necessary - and, in so far as it was developing and augmenting the Irish working class, progressive - integration of Ireland into the existing world economic system. It was a backward-looking utopia, counterposed to the economic programme of the Irish working class, for whom there could be no purely Irish solution.

"The one serious progressive act of imperialism and Irish capitalism has been the creation of an Irish proletariat capable of putting an end to capitalism's futile existence, and capable, as part of a world revolutionary class, of realising the age-old dream of the people of Ireland for freedom. The best traditions of the old, bourgeois, Republicanism, have passed to the socialist working class, the only class in Ireland today capable of transforming society and the subordinate relation with Great Britain - the only unconditionally revolutionary class. The only genuine liberation of Ireland will be from the inexorable - uncontrolled - pressures of internationa capitalism. All the essential goals of all the past defeated and deflected struggles of the Irish people over the centuries against oppression, and for freedom of development and freedom from exploitation, can now only be realised in a Republic of the working people, as part of the Socialist United States of Europe and the world"

('Towards an Irish October').

We naturally rejected the Menshevik-Stalinist notion that there had to be a two-stage revolution in Ireland - first 'the Republic' (independence), and then 'the Workers' Republic'. We rejected the hybrid 'populist Republicanism' - a fusion of the Stalinist two-stage theory with 'native' Republicans who were left wing but put the national question first - represented historically by Paedar O'Donnell, George Gilmore, and the Republican Congress of the 1930s, and in the mid '60s by the 'left' of the Republican movement, the future Official IRA and Workers' Party.

We rejected the kitch 'Trotskyist' response to the stages theories and the populists - the reflex invocation of 'Permanent Revolution'. The job was not to match texts with texts, ours against theirs, permanent revolution against stages theories, as in a card game. Instead we had to analyse reality concretely. On this approach, the conclusion was inescapable.
Ireland had had its 'bourgeois revolution'. In the North, bourgeois relations had been established by extension from Britain after its bourgeois revolution in the 17th century. In the South, land reform was organised 'from above' by Britain in the late 19th/early 20th century, under pressure of a mass revolt. The national division was not pre-capitalist. The basic problem was the split bourgeoisie and the varying links of its different parts with the British ruling class; and the fact that the bourgeoisie, North and South of the Border, could command the allegiance of the working class.

Ireland was a relatively advanced bourgeoisie country, integrated into European capitalism, albeit as a weaker capitalism. That the 26 Counties was really independent politically - independent to the degree possible under capitalist world market economic relations - was shown by its neutrality in World War 2.

"The division in the Irish bourgeoisie prevented the accomplishment of one of the major tasks of the traditional bourgeois revolution - national unification. However, if history and the relationship to Britain make the two statelets peculiarly deformed, they are nonetheless undeniably bourgeois, as a glance at the social organisation and relations of production makes obvious..."

We who fight for the workers' international Republic know that the present Irish capitalists are the only ones we will get. Calling them traitors is useless - they are not traitors to their class, the only sphere in which real loyalty, as opposed to demagogic talk of loyalty, counts..."


AFTER 1968

The massive revolt of the Catholics in 1969 and after, and then the rapid growth of a new IRA after 1970, forced us to reconsider and modify these assessments, and to respond politically to new facts.

Many Irish socialists responded initially with a 'socialism-is-the-only-answer' message, neglecting the national question. We did not. On the contrary, we were the first on the left to point to the nationalist logic of the civil rights struggle, and to argue for raising the national question boldly.

But we did not forget what we had learned. We did not go in for romanticism and flights of fantasy, in the style of Socialist Action - then ING - about the Catholic revolt being the socialist revolution. Even when the Catholic revolt was apparently most successful, we pointed to its limitations:

"The Northern Ireland Catholics fight in isolation, in the most unfavourable conditions imaginable. The rearguard of the Irish fight for national freedom, they are betrayed and abandoned by the 'leaders' of the Irish nation, and are simultaneously cut off from the allies that would make an advance on a socialist basis possible - the Orange majority of the Northern Ireland working class..."

('Workers' Fight', July 23 1972).

We defined what was happening as primarily a Catholic revolt with a limited potential of solving the national question. It was the revolt of the Six County Catholics, not a rebirth of the 1918 all-Ireland nationalist upsurge. It was limited as an anti-imperialist movement because confined to the 5 Counties and because of the split working class there. Nevertheless it had to be supported.

When the Catholic civil rights agitation got underway in 1968-9, we supported it but criticised it on three counts.

1. Logically the central issue was the national question, and events would inexorably force it to the fore. The basic underlying civil right the Catholics lacked was the right to national self-determination.
We said, in early 1969 and long before the Republican movement, some of whose members were leading the civil rights struggles, said it: the goal has to be to smash the Six County state.

2. At the same time, because of its petty bourgeois, Stalinist and populist-Republican leadership, the entire civil rights movement was needlessly divisive. The demands one man (sic) one house, one man one job, one man one vote, were inevitably seen by Protestants as a desire to share what little there was. The issue could have been dynamically and progressively posed in transitional-demand terms: build more houses, thus creating more jobs, etc., etc.

3. We criticised the civil rights movement (including such of its leaders as the IS/SWP supporters in Northern Ireland, like Michael Farrell, who has since become a political satellite of the Provisionals) for political confusion on the national question and on the need to try to unite the working class around the Catholic movement (they wanted to play down the national question in the cause of uniting the working class in the Six Counties around civil rights and socialist propaganda). We also criticised them for organising provocative marches and demonstrations in Protestant areas which were helping stoke up a sectarian explosion.

When the IRA military offensive got under way in 1971, we critically supported their right to fight against the British government in that way. We defended it outspokenly in the British labour movement.

We did not use our previous assessment of the improbability of a revolutionary reunification of Ireland short of a socialist revolution to draw sectarian

* We tried to bring the national question to the centre in 1969 by posing it like this: the mainly Catholic areas (about half the land area of Northern Ireland) should secede to the Republic. This was based on the idea that it would make the Northern state unviable.

The belief that secession of the Catholic areas would force the Protestants into a united Ireland was a major reason why the Free Staters made the deal they did in 1921. Lloyd George promised that a Boundary Commission would in fact redraw the boundaries, thus making Northern Ireland unviable.

In fact secession was anyway the trend in Northern Ireland. Two times before August 1969, Catholic Derry, two miles from the border with the 26 Counties, had set up barricades to keep out Northern Ireland state personnel. In August 1969 Catholic Derry and Catholic West Belfast set up 'free' areas guarded by their own militias. These survived until October 1969.

But in retrospect secession was an artificial way to pose the question of the smashing of the Six County state. In the light of experience since then, there can be no doubt that a Protestant state stripped of the mainly Catholic areas would be viable because the Protestants would make it so.

Some of us were in IS at the time, and our (tentative) proposal about secession was contained in a resolution for IS conference, written in May or June 1969. At the September 1969 IS conference, the leadership used a disloyal misrepresentation of it to distract the discussion. In the meantime they had changed their line from opposition to the British troops to effective support for them, and we were campaigning against this.

The IS leadership said that we wanted the repartition of Ireland. But our resolution explicitly said the goal should be to smash the Northern Ireland state and establish a united Ireland.

Because of the weight of the IS/SWP, this misrepresentation of our position is widespread. It is to be found, for example, in the Penguin book, 'The Left in Britain', edited by David Widgery.
conclusions about the actual struggle that had erupted. But we did not forget that assessment. In fact the 14 years of war have in their own way established very clearly the truth of that assessment.

We maintained a critical political stance towards the IRA. In the early '70s, when such a thing existed, we reprinted Irish socialist criticisms of the IRA, from People's Democracy and from the League for a Workers' Republic. We never had other than scorn for the wild Third-Worldist fantasies and incredible 'permanent revolution' scenarios which the IMG - the closest group to us in its political responses in the early '70s - spun around the Catholic revolt.

At best we believed that the Catholic and IRA revolt would force Britain and the Irish bourgeoisie into radical reorganisation. Of course, it did; Protestant Stormont was abolished in March 1972 and direct rule substituted.

AFTER 1972

Since 1972, despite many important twists and turns, the basic facts of the situation have remained unchanged, in stalemate. The British Army cannot defeat the Catholics; the Catholics cannot defeat the combined forces of the British Army and the Protestants; the British government is not sufficiently energetic, or sufficiently driven, to impose a rearrangement on the Protestants.

In the 26 Counties, there have been some impressive one-off waves of solidarity action - after Bloody Sunday in 1972, and during the hunger strikers. But the basic facts of the political set-up have not changed. The two Green Tory parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, remain dominant - as they were in the '60s. The Irish Labour Party remains a tail of Fine Gael - as it was in the '60s.

Thus the Irish national struggle remains essentially confined to 10% of the Irish nation - the Northern Catholics. That does not detract from the justice of their fight. It does limit its prospects.

It is possible that the situation in the North may be transformed by something from outside it - for example, by a revolutionary upsurge of working-class struggle in the South, creating a new basis for workers' unity in the North. Socialists should do all we can to help such a possibility emerge. But we cannot generate it at will; and in the meantime we have to formulate ideas showing some way forward from the situation as it is now, not as we hope it will be.

We advocated a federal arrangement within Ireland from as early as 1969, but the importance of this element in our politics has increased with the 13-year stalemate.

Militant has long refused to campaign in any way for British troops out of Ireland, instead using general propaganda about the need for socialism to evade the issue. That is contemptible. But the attitude of those many on the Left who argue that 'troops out' and 'the defeat of British imperialism' are the crux of the Irish question, and all else is pettifogging and probably 'capitulation to imperialism', is no less empty phrase-mongering.

'Troops out' is a good slogan. But it is not sufficient. In most national liberation struggles, we can say simply: the imperialist power should get out and hand over to the local nationalist movement. There is no all-Ireland nationalist movement. There is a nationalist movement of the Northern Catholics (10%), regarded with bitter hostility by the Northern Protestants (20%) and sporadic sympathy, but some alarm, by the Southern Catholics (70%).

Lenin argued:

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism' without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of how Social Democracy will solve the problem when it assumes power. A 'negative' slogan unconnected with a definite positive
solution will not 'sharpen', but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declaration".

Nowhere is this more true than on the slogan 'Troops out of Ireland'. In early 1969 some of us argued against IS/SWP's almost-exclusive concentration on 'Troops out' (until the troops went on the streets, in August 1969, and IS dropped the call!) We criticised the implied illusion that the Catholic civil rights movement would organically 'grow over' into socialism; and argued for propaganda for the workers' republic.

In the mid-'70s we argued against the notion (put forward by the IMG - now Socialist Action - and others) that a mass movement could be built in Britain on the single slogan, 'Troops out'. It was not out of anti-imperialist 'purity' that we insisted that a movement in Britain must explicitly argue solidarity with the Republicans: it was because we believed a movement must give some positive answers, and none was clear from the slogan 'Troops out'.

We use 'Troops out' now as one means of focusing the issue in Britain, and getting across the message that Britain has no rights in Ireland. It is not a full programme, though some on the left sometimes talk and act as if it is. Even the Provisionals, more serious than their less thoughtful British admirers, put precise demands on the way Britain should get out.

If British troops quit Ireland tomorrow, it is quite likely that there would be a sectarian civil war, leading to repartition.

Self-determination? Unify Ireland? The Provisionals are not strong enough for it. The Northern Protestants are actively hostile to it. The 26 County ruling class has no real wish for it.

The scene would be set for a section of the Protestants to make a drive for the current UDA policy of an 'independent Ulster'. This drive would involve, at least, a massive crackdown on the Republicans, and, probably, the mass slaughter, rounding-up, and driving-out of the Catholics. The Northern Catholics would (rightly) resist violently. Dublin would give some token assistance to the Catholics but do nothing decisive. There would be mass population movements, a repartition: Ireland would be irrevocably and bitterly split into Orange and Green states. There would be a bloodbath.

The conventional left answer to this, that 'There's already a bloodbath', is no answer. Simmering war with hundreds of casualties is different from all-out war with thousands. Different not only in immediate human terms, but also in terms of the implications for the future possibilities of socialism - i.e. of uniting the Catholic and Protestant workers.

The other answer, 'Revolutions always involve bloodshed', is no better. There is no comparison between the revolutionary violence of the working class against its exploiters, or of a subject nation against a conquering army, and the violence of two working-class communities slaughtering each other.

All this does not mean that we should fail to support troops out. British troops have no right to be in Ireland, and do no good there. That the situation and the prospects now are so bleak is in large part Britain's work.

But it does mean that we should couple the call for troops out with some intelligent proposal for a solution within Ireland - and condemn those who call for troops out without such a proposal as mindless phrasemongers.

The only conceivable solution given the present facts of the situation or something resembling them is a united Ireland with federalism i.e. an attempt to negotiate between the sections of the Irish people and to conciliate the Protestants.

Theconciliation, realistically, would be backed up with a certain element of coercion - i.e. strong indications to the Protestants that prospects for an alternative to a united Ireland were pretty bleak - and would involve some
repression against die-hard Protestant groups. But that is different from
straight conquest of the Protestants. Logically, conquest is the only alterna-
tive, given the Protestants' attitudes. But it is not possible — who would
conquer them? — and not desirable anyway, from any working-class point of view.

It is possible to evade these issues by wishful thinking. It is possible
to assume that the crucial point the national struggle would magically 'grow
cover' into socialism, and in some 'dialectical' leap the Protestants would be
converted to Republicanism. It is possible to remain blinkered in a sort of
inverted British nationalism, saying that 'the defeat of British imperialism'
and its effect on the 'balance of world forces' are the things that really
matter, and that a positive solution within Ireland is a secondary issue.

It is possible to resort to a crude theory of the Protestants as pure
pawns of Britain, so that their reactionary ideas would drain away like water
out of a bath once the 'plug' of British troops was pulled out.

But that is not Marxism. It is not serious, honest politics. We will not
even be very reliable anti-imperialists if our 'anti-imperialism' is only as
strong as our ability to use consoling myths to shield our eyes from uncom-
fortable facts.

The federal proposal might not avert sectarian civil war, either. Whether
anything short of a mass socialist movement uniting the workers of both
communities (or a big section of them) can end the present impasse in a progres-
sive sense is doubtful. Our programme is to develop that socialist movement;
seriously, not by empty schematising about the present nationalist struggle
becoming socialist if only it is intensified sufficiently, or national/communal
issues fading away if only bread-and-butter trade-union issues are emphasised
loudly enough.

We should not blur our socialist programme by false 'realism', by getting
tied up in working out 'answers' for the present forces in the situation over
which we have no control anyway. But a socialist programme needs to include
democratic demands, and a possibility of relating to the political situation
now, of division and anguish, more concretely than just by saying that a
united class movement would be better.

Whether we can have any positive influence on the situation within Ireland
depends on there being a material force to fight for such a programme. At
present there is no such force. But no force can be gathered without first
proclaiming a programme. And no adequate programme can be formulated without
first boldly 'saying what is'.

OUR ERRORS

This summary demonstrates, we think, the consistency of the approach that
some of us have had since well before the beginning of the Catholic revolt.
Whatever inconsistencies may be found in this or that detail, the fundamental
approach is coherent.

That does not mean, however, that our politics have been completely
adequate. Even in the early '70s, when we put most stress on solidarity with
the Catholic revolt, we were critical of the IRA: on the whole, however, we
tended to suppress criticism as much as we deceptively could — and that was too
much. The basic principles, views and assessments were correct: but we tended to
downplay our own assessments, criticisms and politics in deference to a
petty-bourgeois nationalist formation because it was 'leading the struggle
against imperialism'. We should not have been so self-effacing.
"Any man who tells you that an act of armed resistance - even if offered by 10 men armed only with stones - any man who tells you that such an act of resistance is premature, imprudent or dangerous - any and every such man should at once be spurned and spat at. For remark you this and recollect it, that somewhere, and somehow, and by somebody a beginning must be made, and that the first act of resistance is always and must be ever premature, imprudent and dangerous".

- James Pintan Lalor.

Thus it was with the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. This was the spirit in which the successors of Lalor acted. And to act at all they needed much such a spirit.

One thousand men, one quarter of them the trade union militants of the Citizen Army, badly armed and with little training, went out into the streets of Dublin to challenge and to fight the greatest empire the world had then seen. Many of them knew - certainly the leaders knew - that, given the isolation of Dublin, they had little chance of success.

Yet: "We went out to break the connection between this country and the British Empire and to establish an Irish Republic... believing that the British government has no right in Ireland and never can have any right in Ireland", proudly explained Connolly to the military court that condemned him to death a week later.

Earlier Connolly had summed up the spirit of desperate determination which governed him between the outbreak of war in 1914 and his murder in 1916:

"If you strike at, imprison or kill us, out of our prisons or graves we will still evoke a spirit that will thwart you, and maybe, raise a force that will destroy you. We defy you! Do your worst!" (Irish Worker, 1914).

With such conviction Connolly faced the British government and its firing squad. Awaiting his executioners he remained unrepentant: "Hasn't it been a good life - and isn't this a good end?" he said to his wife when she visited him for the last time. Yet, at his death, he believed that the socialists who knew him in Britain and America would never understand what he, a revolutionary socialist, was doing fighting for the mere national independence of Ireland. He knew that many of the socialists would regard it as an aberration for a Marxist to take Connolly's course. And of course many of them did.

How came Connolly to that end of his, which united the heroic act of traditional Irish Republicanism with the first decisive act of revolutionary labour?

Born of Irish parents in Edinburgh in 1868, Connolly started work in a printshop at 10 or 11 and at 12 in a bakery. Like most emigre families, the Connollys remained very much attuned to Ireland. There at that time the crypto-socialist Fenian movement of the 1860s had given way to the fight of the Land League and Parnell's parliamentary party.

The League welded the tenants together to fight the landlords. Tenant solidarity and its warlike expression, the boycott, together with Parnell's obstruction in parliament, shook the English system. Callous men who had never bothered when the Irish people suffered in silence now became convinced of the need to solve 'the Irish problem' from above, before it solved itself from below.

The Connolly family atmosphere in Edinburgh, like that of most Irish families then, was saturated with a spirit of bitter rebellion against the 'English system': it was the air which the child James Connolly breathed, and it never left his system.
At 14 he joined the army, following many young workers forced in by economic pressure and following also a Fenian tradition: in the army they learned to use arms. Connolly was stationed in Ireland and it is probable that he deserted.

THE IRISH SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN PARTY

By 1889 he had become a socialist. The Jacobin ideas of the Irish Republicans transplanted to the conditions of the workers in Edinburgh blossomed easily and naturally into a socialist consciousness. From then to 1896 he developed his knowledge, winding up in the Marxist Social Democratic Federation. (Though his 'Marxism' remained one-sided: he seems never to have shed Catholicism).

He married and 'inherited' a job as an Edinburgh dustman, but when he fought a local government election he was squeezed out and thereafter found it impossible to get a job.

Then came the turn which threw him for the first time completely into Irish politics. The Dublin Socialist Society invited him to become its paid organiser. He accepted.

By May 1896 he was ready to transform the group into the Irish Socialist Republican Party. From the start the ISRP distinguished itself by declaring for an independent Irish Republic. Even the SNP declared only for Home Rule for Ireland, and many socialists considered it a betrayal of 'socialist internationalism' to bother at all with the question of oppressed nationalities.

Following Marx rather than the shallow 'Marxists' of his time, Connolly blended the plebeian revolutionary tradition of the United Irishmen and the Fenians with revolutionary socialism. He declared:

"Only the Irish working class remains as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland".

Often he expounded his ideas on this question.

"The development of democracy in Ireland has been smothered by the Union Act of Union of 1801 of Britain and Ireland. Remove that barrier, throw the Irish people back upon their own resources, make them realise that the causes of poverty, of lack of progress, of arrested civil and national development are then to be sought for within and not without, are in their power to remove or perpetuate, and 'ere long that spirit of democratic progress will invade and permeate all our social and civil institutions".

"The Socialist Party of Ireland [the ISRP's predecessor] recognises and most enthusiastically endorses the principles of internationalism, but it recognises that principle must be sought through the medium of universal brotherhood rather than by the self-extinction of distinct nations within the political maw of overgrown empires" (Forward, March 1911).

And:

"We desire to preserve with the English people the same political relations as with the people of France, of Germany or of any other country. The greatest possible friendship, but also the strictest independence... Thus, inspired by another ideal, conducted by reason and not by tradition, the ISRP arrives at the same conclusion as the most irreconcilable nationalists".

But:

"Having learned from history that all bourgeois movements end in compromise, that the bourgeois revolutionaries of today become the conservatives of tomorrow, the Irish socialists refuse to deny or to lose their identity with those who only half understand the problem of liberty. They seek only the alliance and friendship of those hearts who, loving liberty for its own sake, are not afraid to follow its banner when it is uplifted by the hands of the working class, who have most need of it. Their friends are those who would not
hesitate to follow that standard of liberty, to consecrate their lives in its service, even should it lead to the terrible arbitration of the sword".

These words were written 19 years before Easter 1916.

Connolly at the same time struggled against the middle class Home Rule party. He mocked at those who saw mere independence as a panacea.

"If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the Green Flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the socialist republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through the whole army of commercial-industrial institutions she has planted in the country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs. England would rule you to your ruin!"

A social as well as a national revolution was necessary:

"A system of society in which the workshops, factories, docks, railways, shipyards etc. shall be owned by the nation... seems best calculated to secure the highest form of industrial efficiency combined with the greatest amount of individual freedom from state despotism..."

But he qualified this:

"State ownership and control is not necessarily socialist - if it were, then the army and the navy, the police, the judges, the gaolers, the informers and the hangmen would all be socialist functionaries as they are all state officials - but the ownership by the state of all the lands and material for labour, combined with the cooperative control by the workers of such land and materials, would be socialist... To the cry of the middle-class reformers, 'Make this or that the property of the government', we reply - 'yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property'." (Workers Republic, 1899).

Arguing thus, fighting for working-class independence from Home Rulers and Nationalists alike, Connolly was by no means a 'millennial socialist'. He fought for limited gains and against sectarian socialists who refused to do so.

"Of course some of our socialist friends, especially those who have never got beyond the ABC of the question, will remind me that even in a republic the worker is exploited, as for instance in France and the United States. Therefore, they argue, we cannot be Republicans. To this I reply: The countries mentioned have only capitalism to deal with. We have capitalism and a monarchy..."

This, too, was his approach to the national question: we have capitalism and national oppression.

Connolly would have had no time for the 'pure' nationalists today. Neither would he have time for those who, with the slogan 'For Connolly's Workers' Republic' on their lips, declare that the reunification of Ireland, even under capitalism, the removal of part of the double oppression of the workers of Ireland, is of no interest to socialists. Connolly was no 'Connolly sectarian'.

Connolly's ISRP never had more than 100 members, though at certain times it was influential beyond its membership. During the Boer War its anti-government, pro-Boer press was smashed by the police.

**INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM**

In 1903 Connolly went to the United States on a lecture tour. Shortly afterwards he moved there with his family. He worked for the American Socialist Labour Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. He had been one of the guiding spirits of a group of SDP members who had split off the same year to found a British SLP on the model of the American party.
Though eventually it was to become rigidly sectarian, Daniel De Leon's SLP was at that time producing trenchant criticism of the existing trade union and socialist organisations. De Leon was among the first to castigate the increasingly conservative and cautious trade union bureaucrats as 'labour lieutenants of capitalism'. He also saw how feeble were the big socialist parties of Europe with their dominant parliamentaryism. Both the one-sided trade unionists and the equally one-sided socialist parties seemed to De Leon to rule out any chance of working-class revolutionary action. Just how right he was, was shown by the collapse of the labour movement in 1914.

De Leon tried to answer the problem he himself posed by arguing that the working class needed to build up a real social strength inside the womb of capitalism just as capitalism itself had done in the womb of feudalism. He proposed an infrastructure composed of industry-wide unions, capable of both seizing and running industry. And he saw the need to build, both politically and economically, towards a strategy of taking power. De Leon was groping theoretically for a specific working-class organisational form of industrial and social rule. History was to provide her own answer: the workers' Soviets thrown up in Russia in 1905 and in Europe after 1917.

Of De Leon, Lenin was later to say that, despite a certain sectarianism, he was only man since Marx to add anything to Marxism. But, as so often happens, the De Leonites combined many correct ideas with a sectarian practice which rendered their ideas impotent.

Connolly remained with the De Leonites for some years, eventually breaking with them over their sectarianism. But while shedding much of the political harshness and intolerance of the SLP he retained a belief in 'industrial unionism'. Until 1910 he was an organiser for the IWW - the great syndicalist movement of migrant workers in America.

In 1910 he returned to Ireland, armed with the ideas of industrial unionism, to begin a period of mass activity which saw the Irish working class rousing itself for the first time into militant action.

**THE IRISH TRANSPORT & GENERAL WORKERS' UNION**

In 1910 Connolly returned from the USA to a changing Ireland. Jim Larkin had been at work for three years organising the dockers, carters and other trades misnamed 'the unskilled'.

The 'new' general unions which grew in Britain after the matchgirls' and dockers' strikes of 1889 had been feeble in Ireland. Now labour was stirring itself again in Britain and in Ireland as well.

In Britain, where the general unions were already in the grip of self-serving officials, the labour upsurge created a rank-and-file 'unofficial' movement. In Ireland a 'new model' union was being built: the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.

Connolly became an organiser for the ITGWU. A chastened Connolly, reflecting perhaps his experience in the American SLP, he had written before leaving the USA:

"Perhaps some day there will arise a socialist writer who in his writings will live up to the spirit of the Communist Manifesto, that the socialists are not apart from the labour movement, are not a sect, but are simply that part of the working class which pushes on all others, which most clearly understands the line of march".

Yet he remained a 'De Leonite' in his basic conceptions: the workers must build industry-wide unions which would act together against the capitalist class. As the organisational strength and class consciousness of the workers grew, it would be reflected in the ballot box, until finally a sort of dual power in society existed with the militant workers organising and mobilising, to confront
and finally expropriate the capitalists. Should the capitalist state attempt to use repression its limbs would be paralysed by the industrial power of the workers — and bloodshed would be minimal.

Whether the workers, once a majority wanted socialism, were to be helpless before the bosses' state, or the bosses helpless before the workers, would be determined by the industrial strength and cohesiveness of labour.

Both Connolly and Larkin saw their trade union work — and the ITGWU itself — in this revolutionary light. Connolly became a member of the Socialist Party of Ireland, the successor of the ISRF, as the other plane of the labour army they were mobilising.

As ITGWU organiser in Belfast from 1911 Connolly came up against the division in the working class which is still rampant today. In 1907 Larkin had allied with Protestant radicals (who had split from the Orange Order to form the Independent Orange Institute) and had briefly succeeded in uniting Catholic and Protestant workers in Belfast. But the rising wave of anti-Home-Rule agitation (during which the original Ulster Volunteers were organised) swamped what was a promising beginning of working-class unity. Connolly got to the heart of the problem when he wrote, in 1913:

"Let the truth be told, however ugly. Here the Orange working class are. slaves in spirit because they have been reared up among a people whose conditions of servitude were more slavish than their own. In Catholic Ireland the working class are rebels in spirit and democratic in feeling because for hundreds of years they have found no class as lowly paid or badly treated as themselves. At one time in the industrial world of Great Britain and Ireland the skilled labourer locked down with contempt upon the unskilled and bitterly resented his attempt to get his children taught any of the skilled trades; the feeling of the Orangemen of Ireland toward the Catholics is but a glorified representation on a big stage of the same unworthy motives".

Connolly looked to a future unity of all Irish workers in struggle against capitalism for the Workers' Republic — a unity which was to be postponed more than 50 years by the grip the British Empire kept on Ireland with partition as its weapon and the Irish capitalist class, North and South, as its garrison.

"In their movement the North and South will again clasp hands, again it will 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 DUBLIN LOCK-OUT OF 1913**

In contrast with the North, the workers in the South, led by Larkin, were making big advances. The standard of living of the newly organised rose substantially. So did their confidence. They had found a new weapon — class solidarity. No trade, no workplace, was isolated in its struggle. The policy of sympathetic strike action was applied by the union with tremendous success.

And of course the employers hit back. Led by William Martin Murphy, 400 Dublin employers organised to break the union. The famous Dublin Labour War of 1913 followed. Those workers who refused to sign a document repudiating the union were locked out. But all the union's members stood firm.

For eight months the bitter war dragged on. Before it ended strikers had been batoned to death by police. Larkin and Connolly (recalled from Belfast to help) had been arrested, and the Citizen Army, the strikers' militia that grew to become the first Red Army in Europe, had been organised to fight back against the cops.

After eight months the labour war ended. The workers were not defeated — the union remained intact. But it was not a victory either: after that the union was
more cautious and less able to bring full pressure to bear on the bosses. Connolly blamed the semi-defeat on the isolation of Dublin — on the fact that the British trade unions had merely given financial help while withholding the decisive aid of direct industrial action which they had it in their power to give. This failure of solidarity was a big blow to Connolly.

However, as late as November 1913 he had written:

"We are told that the English people contributed their help to our enslavement. It is true. It is also true that the Irish people contributed soldiers to crush every democratic movement of the English people... Slaves themselves, the English helped to enslave others; slaves themselves, the Irish helped to enslave others. There is no room for recrimination."

But after the strike Connolly had less confidence in the immediate revolutionary potential of the English workers, seeing them, correctly, as tied too tightly to their imperialist ruling class. The support of the British labour movement for the 1914 war reinforced him in this bitter conclusion.

With the end of the strike in 1914, Larkin went to the USA (where he remained until 1923) and Connolly took charge of the union and the task of rebuilding its strength and confidence. And the Citizen Army was maintained and strengthened as Labour 's independent armed force. This was made possible by the fact the northern Unionists and the Green Tories also had their 'private' militias: the Ulster Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers.

**PARTITION**

When the English Liberals and the Irish Home-Rule Tories, in face of a virtual rebellion by the Unionists and their Ulster Volunteers, agreed to the partition of Ireland, Connolly wrote the most tragically prophetic words he ever penned:

"The proposal to leave a Home Rule minority at the mercy of an ignorant majority with the evil record of the Orange Party is a proposal that should never have been made, and... the establishment of such a scheme should be resisted with armed force if necessary... Filled with the belief that they were after defeating the imperialist government and the Nationalists combined, the Orangemen would have scant regard for the rights of the minority left at its mercy.

"Such a scheme would destroy the labour movement by disrupting it. It would perpetuate in a form aggravated in evil the discords now prevalent and help the Home Rule and Orange capitalists and clerics to keep their rallying cries before the public as the political watchwords of the day. In short, it would make division more intense and confusion of ideas and parties more confused...

"The betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured... All hopes of uniting the workers, irrespective of religion or old political battle cries will be shattered, and through North and South the issue of Home Rule will be still used to cover the iniquities of the Capitalist and Landlord class. I am not speaking without due knowledge of the sentiments of the organised labour movement in Ireland when I say we would much rather see the Home Rule Bill defeated than see it carried with Ulster or any part of Ulster left out..."

With the outbreak of war the issue was shelved 'for the duration' and the Home Rulers became recruiting agents for Britain. Their Irish Volunteers split, with a minority adopting a revolutionary nationalist stand.

Connolly now recalled — publicly — the Irish truism that Ireland could only hope for a successful rebellion against Britain while Britain was at war. And he vowed not to miss the chance to strike at the Empire. In August 1914, to avert
the expected threat of a wartime famine, of high prices in the towns, he advocated guerrilla resistance, strikes, and sabotage to keep enough food in Ireland to feed the people.

The article ("Our Duty in this Crisis!") ended on a note which showed that he did not see it as merely an Irish struggle:

"Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the troo to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

He began to plan an insurrection. After initial conflict, an alliance was entered into with the nationalist volunteers of Padraig Pearse. The Communist International was later, in 1920, to encourage communists in countries where genuinely revolutionary nationalists existed to join with them — 'to strike together, while marching separately'. Connolly's well-known remark to some Citizen Army men before the Rising: "The odds are a thousand to one against us, but in the event of victory hold onto your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached", shows he had a similar conception to the International.

THE EASTER RISING

As early as 1910 Connolly had come close to an understanding of the process of permanent revolution. In his foreword to his book 'Labour in Irish History' he wrote:

"In the evolution of civilisation the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must preserve its pace with the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation and... the shifting of economic and political forces which accompanies the development of the system of capitalist society leads inevitably to the increasing conservatism of the non-working-class elements and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class".

The Irish bourgeoisie:

"... have a thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism... Only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland".

If Irish labour between 1916 and 1923 had adopted this perspective, maintained its political independence and fought for its own class goals, then history could have taken a very different turn. To examine why it didn't is to explore the great weakness of Connolly: the inadequacy of his understanding of the organisation needed to fight for socialism.

He had understood that labour's real strength is industrial. But he had lost sight of, or perhaps never fully grasped, the fact that the potential social strength of labour, however militant on economic issues, would only be real to the degree that it was ideologically prepared; and in turn that this must be expressed in a political organisation which knew its own mind, a party like Lenin's party.

Connolly's SPI was (until its old leaders were expelled and it was reorganised as the Communist Party of Ireland in 1921) an old-fashioned and ramshackle affair, over-recoiling from De Leonite 'purism'. The compromisers, the Lib/Labs, the 'Mensheviks', were not outside it, looking in — some of them were its leaders, as they were also of the ITGWU.

After 1916 they set themselves up as a bureaucracy within the ITGWU, and betrayed socialism by timidly trailing after the bourgeois leaders who had seized control of the national struggle.

This was the flaw in Connolly's design. Not seeing it, he felt no inhibitions. Relentlessly he pressed for an armed rising, outdaring even the nationalist
idealists around Pearse.

In 1910, in 'Labour in Irish History', Connolly had told the endless story of the lost chances and the botched risings that succeeded each other like monotonous days of mourning and depression in Irish history. Bitterly he wrote - and the bitterness attested to his determination to do better himself if the chance came.

Nor did he believe that there was such a thing as a ripe revolutionary situation. Revolutionary action would make it ripe.

"An epoch to be truly revolutionary must have a dominating number of men with the revolutionary spirit - ready to dare all and take all risks for the sake of their ideas... Revolutionaries who shrink from giving blow for blow until the great day has arrived and they have every shoestring in its place and every man has got his gun and the enemy has kindly consented to postpone action in order not to needlessly hurry the revolutionaries nor disarray their plans - such revolutionaries only exist in two places: on the comic opera stage and on the stage of Irish national politics" (November 1915).

The plan finally agreed on was for simultaneous risings in a number of areas. But at the eleventh hour the titular head of the Volunteers called off the Easter Sunday manoeuvres, which were planned as a cover for the rising. Faced with this catastrophe, expecting to be rounded up, believing that European peace was imminent and that, through their failure to act, Ireland would miss the chance of an independent voice at the coming peace conference, the leaders in Dublin had to make their choice.

In 1914 Connolly had indicated what his choice would be in such a situation. He had written:

"Even an unsuccessful attempt at socialist revolution by force of arms, following the paralysis of the economic life of militarism, would be less disastrous to the socialist cause than the act of socialists allowing themselves to be used in the slaughter of their brothers".

AFTER EASTER 1916

On Easter Sunday 1916 their choice lay between one kind of defeat or another. Either a defeat in battle, that might help rouse the forces for a new struggle. Or defeat without a fight, which would bring discouragement and demoralisation in its wake as so often before in Irish history.

Connolly and Pearse decided to fight. They went out to try to start that fire Connolly had written of at the outbreak of the war. For a week they defended in arms the 32 County Irish Republic, one and indivisible, which they had proclaimed on Easter Monday 1916. Before they surrendered, Dublin was in ruins.

They died before British Army firing squads, together with the other leaders of the Rising, after summary Court Martial. Connolly, grievously wounded, was court-martialled in bed and shot propped up in a chair.

They did indeed light the fire of revolt which Connolly had spoken of, but it was not to be controlled by men of their persuasion nor to lead to their goal. The middle-class leaders of the Irish national revolution first misled it and then betrayed it to British imperialism.

And today, the bonds and debentures, the capitalists and their warlords, still exist. In Ireland they rule - for themselves and also for British capitalism. The Southern Irish capitalists, wrapped in the Green trappings of 'traditional' Nationalism and perpetually 'honouring' - in hollow, gruesome mockery - the 'men of 1916', still oppress the workers of Ireland with exploitation, poverty, unemployment and forced emigration. They are engaged now, as for decades past, in the most criminal collusion with British imperialism, sabotaging and under-
mining the revolt of the Northern Ireland victims of partition, which Connolly first denounced nearly 60 years ago.

'Connolly' has been made part of their canon. His name is that of a national hero, while his ideas are either suppressed or heavily toned down. As if foreseeing it, he himself once said of the great Irish Jacobin Wolfe Tone: "Apostles of freedom are ever idolised when dead but crucified when living".

For us, living in Britain where the labour movement has only begun to emerge from stagnation and where the worst pedants can pass for the best revolutionaries, Connolly can be a bridge between ourselves and the only real tradition of revolutionary action in the British Isles.
For a federal united Ireland

Socialists in Britain frequently talk as if the Protestants of Northern Ireland simply do not exist. Thus Socialist Action's headline reporting Sinn Fein's electoral success in 1983 gave them "42% of the vote". In fact it was 42% of the Catholic vote. This headline was not an accidental slip, but typical of a whole approach. In fact the Protestants have been central to the Northern Ireland crisis. It was the Protestant backlash against Britain's policy of reforming Northern Ireland in the '60s which generated the Provisional IRA; it was the Protestant general strike, not the Provisional IRA campaign, which wrecked the power-sharing experiment in 1974. It is important, therefore, that the Left is clear about the Protestant/Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland. The Protestant community in Northern Ireland is a 'distinct community with its own history, culture, and psychology. If it existed in its own distinct territory, it would have all the features Marxists recognise as making up a nation. It does not have a distinct territory - there is a major Catholic community even within the Protestant heartlands. Therefore it is not a nation. In any case, because the Protestant and Catholic communities in the North of Ireland are so intertwined, there can be no question of full 'Protestant self-determination'.

Our slogan for Ireland is: self-determination for the people of Ireland as a whole. But within that we need a democratic policy for the question of the Protestant minority.

The tragedy of Irish society, and specifically of the Irish working class, lies in this: that the divisions among Irish workers stand as an impenetrable barrier to socialism and a socialist revolution which would bypass those divisions; while at the same time the decayed state of capitalism in Ireland, and the decrepitude and feebleness of the divided Irish bourgeoisie, has so far ruled out a democratic rearrangement of relations between the two communities of Ireland (within the Six Counties and between the North-East and the rest of Ireland) which would allow working-class unity to develop.

BOLSHEVIKS

There can be no socialist revolution Ireland without the unity of large sections of the Catholic and Protestant workers. There can be no democratic solution in Ireland - that is, no solution offering the best, clearest conditions for the free development of the class struggle - without democratic relations between the majority (Catholic) and minority (Protestant) community. Socialists should therefore support the maximum democratic rights for the Protestant minority compatible with the rights of the majority.

As a general principle Marxists favour regional or provincial autonomy for markedly distinct areas within a state, together with the most decentralised possible local government. The Bolsheviks put it like this:

"In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife, it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican form of government... the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever, to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority.

"This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully-democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc." (1913 Resolution of the Bolshevik Party Central Committee).

This principle applies to the mainly-Protestant areas within a united Ireland.
Within Ireland our slogan for the Protestant community must be: autonomy and local self-government of that community's own affairs to the furthest extent compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people.

Such a proposal for a united, independent Ireland, and within it a measure of self-government for regions, and within those regions maximum local autonomy for towns, districts, etc., can offer both majority and minority the maximum of democratic guarantees possible without infringing the rights of the other community. The Catholic majority of Ireland would have the rights of a majority within all-Ireland politics. Catholic minorities in mainly Protestant regions would have the protection of local government (town/district) autonomy, plus the constitutional guarantees (courts, bills of rights, appeal procedures, inspectorates, penalties against sectarian practices) of the federal government. Likewise Protestant minorities in mainly-Catholic regions. The concentrated Protestant minority in the North East would have the safeguard of regional institutions. So far as formal democratic constitutional provisions can ever guarantee anything, this proposal would protect the rights of both Catholic majority and Protestant minority, while allowing neither to oppress the other.

The precise details of such an arrangement will be worked out by those who will live within such structures. A federation of two regions - the four heavily-Protestant counties, and the other 28 - with local autonomy within each region, e.g., for the Belfast Catholics, is one possibility. The parts of the federation would have roughly the same relation to each other and to the federal (all-Ireland) government as the states in the USA have to each other and to the US federal government.

Short of military conquest or driving out the Protestants, there is no other conceivable form of bourgeois united Ireland that one that allows such autonomy. Bourgeois green nationalism and its petty-bourgeois spin-offs can never unite the Irish people. The sectarian Catholic nature of the Southern state has reinforced Partition and the communal divisions. Indeed: it is by no means certain that a socialist Ireland could dispense with such federal arrangements. The divisions are profound — cultural, psychological, historical. Even an agreement between Catholic and Protestant workers to cooperate in fighting for socialism would not mean that these differences between the sections of the Irish people were immediately eliminated.

**DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS**

The proposal for local autonomy is a democratic proposal — it is part of a transitional programme for Ireland. "The Fourth International", wrote Trotsky, "does not discard the programme of the old 'minimal' demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective..." (The Transitional Programme). The sectarian fear of advocating reforms and democratic demands lest they undermine the prospect of revolution should be rejected. To advocate democratic demands in no way confines us to a perspective of reform. Reform demands within the revolutionary programme are weapons for the mobilisation of the masses, including (as in this case) the reconciliation of divisions within the working class.

The socialist programme for Ireland is workers' revolution. That requires the unity of the working class North and South, Protestant and Catholic, and the building of an all-Ireland revolutionary party that can combine the struggle against British imperialism and for the unity of Ireland with an all-Ireland working-class struggle for socialism. Reforms and democratic demands are not counterposed to the workers' revolution: on the contrary, they are an irreplaceable part of the work of leading the working class towards it.

**REPUBLICANISM AND GREEN NATIONALISM**

From the point of view of both Irish Republicanism and working-class politics
the choice to be made about the Northern Ireland Protestant population is either
to accept its existence and its right to existence or else to try to drive it out
or suppress it by force - to 'undo the conquest'. As long as 200 years ago, secular
and democratic Irish Republicanism adopted the former policy, and Wolfe Tone
expressed it thus:

"To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past
dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the
denominations Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter..."

This is the irreducible basic principle of secular Irish nationalism and
Republicanism, and also, of course, a basic principle of Irish socialism. Anything
less is inevitably a lapse into nationalism, communalism, 'Catholic nationalism'
and revanchism. To try to define away the Protestant community with a political
tag which dismisses them as 'pro-imperialist' is to abandon Republicanism. It
stands nearer to the programme of King James's Dublin Parliament of 1659,
which made wholesale confiscations of Protestant property, than to Wolfe Tone,
whose oft-quoted words (above) marked the decisive break with that mainly-
Catholic tradition.

Green nationalism can only propose to replace the present oppressed half-a-
million Catholic minority in the North with an oppressed one-million Protestant
minority in a united Ireland. If a united Ireland bore any resemblance to the
existing 26 County state, then the Protestants would be an oppressed minority
from the beginning. Lenin's principle: "A struggle against the privileges and
violence of the oppressing nation and no toleration of the striving for privileges
on the part of the oppressed nation", should guide us also on the relation between
communities and groups within a nation.

In the event of a working-class upsurge in the South which could appeal to
the Northern Ireland Protestant workers on a class basis, the consistently
democratic element in our programme would in no way limit us or hold us back.
On the contrary, its advocacy by revolutionary socialists and Republicans would
help prepare the way for a socialist solution, in so far as it was successful in
placating Protestant fears of being incorporated as a minority into a state
like the existing green-nationalist, Catholic-sectarian 26 Counties.

*AGAINT 'SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE PROTESTANTS'*

There is a radical difference between the proposal above, for regional and
local autonomy within a united Ireland, and the proposal of a separate,
Partitionist, Northern Ireland state, whether independent or ruled by Westminster.
The 'right to self-determination' of the Protestant community does not make
sense. There is no territory naturally suited to the exercise of such 'self-
determination'. Any 'Protestant state' would entrap and oppress a large Catholic
minority, as the Six Counties has done for over 60 years. Concretely, now,
'Protestant self-determination' would mean restoration of Stormont (the Northern
Ireland parliament abolished in 1972) and/or repartition. It would not be a demo-
cratic solution, clearing the path for class struggle, but a sectarian solution,
bitterly divisive for the working class.

*NO CONSTITUTIONAL ILLUSIONS!*

Federalism could not mean letting the Protestants in the North-East go on as usual,
discriminating socially against Catholics. In so far as such discrimination is a
matter of local (or, in a federal Ireland, regional) government patronage, etc., it
would be outlawed. Formal democratic constitutional guarantees can never, of
course, guarantee anything if the conflicts of real social forces dictate other-
wise. The essential purpose of the proposals above is not as advice to the powers-
that-be, but as part of a socialist programme around which Irish socialists and
Republicans could assemble a real united working class force, capable of being
a real material guarantee against all sectarian discrimination.