

MARXISM, TERRORISM & THE IRA

(Excerpts from articles and editorials in Workers Republic, Workers Fight, and Socialist Organiser).

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(From Workers Republic January 1967)

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NOTE ON AUTHORSHIP: The article 'Marxism and Terrorism' was written by Keith and Carolan; the NC resolution was drafted by Kinnell; the press statement, by Gardiner and Carolan; the Socialist Organiser article by John O'Mahony. The other pieces were written by Carolan. The 1967 article was published under the name of a well-known former IRA member who wrote the first draft of one section concerning events of the mid-'50s in which he had participated.

This excerpt is from an article which was published in *An Solas/Workers Republic*, magazine of the Irish Workers Group, in January 1967. It was an attempt at an assessment of the history and politics of the IRA and of its connection with both mainstream bourgeois politics and communist politics in Ireland. At that time the rump IRA was 'rethinking' after the complete failure of its attempt at a guerilla war on the Border in the late '50s, formally wound up early in 1962.

[On the 1939 IRA military campaign in England]

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

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

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

[On the IRA and the Protestant workers]

There is a further contradiction within Sinn Féin, and that is the discrepancy

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

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

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

On January 30 1972 British paratroopers shot down 13 unarmed civilians who had been on a Republican march in Derry City. Not long afterwards a bomb exploded in the officers' mess at Aldershot barracks, killing an army priest and five women cleaners. The target aimed at was, of course, the officers.

AFTER BLOODY SUNDAY, JAN. 72

... IN ALL the liberal and humanitarian outrage at the slaughter there is a danger that the main point will be missed.

The point is that there are only two possible alternatives in Northern Ireland now.

Either the Republicans will win, and Ireland be reunited according to the wishes of the vast majority of her people, with as much autonomy for the Orange people as is compatible with the rights of the majority.

Or the British Government will be allowed to bludgeon the Northern Ireland Catholics into submission to Westminster and Stormont.

The first is the only conceivable solution: the other would be a reactionary holding operation. It would be followed in due time, after a period of recuperation, by another rising of the republican people.

Ireland's centuries-long struggle for freedom is a series of wars of revolt, each one being crushed by 'force and fraud': but only for a while.

Each defeat was followed by a new beginning - and a new revolt. 'We shall rise again' became - and remains - the way in which Republicanism summed up its history and asserted its determination that (in the words of the great republican Pearse) 'Ireland unfree shall never be at peace'.

Let no one be under any illusions about that. Let no one, horror-stricken at Derry, mumble about peace. Those who would bring real peace to Ireland must aid the Republicans to victory.

There can be neither peace nor freedom while the puppet Stormont state exists. That state imprisons against their will a Catholic minority bigger as a proportion of the 6 County population than would be all the Protestants in a united Ireland.

The Northern Ireland state is totally artificial, the result of manipulation by Britain of divisions among the Irish people, for her own ends. The argument that Northern Ireland must remain in existence until a majority of its people want otherwise is cod-'democracy'.

It is preposterous because the State is artificial and the majority completely arbitrary.

Ireland, 32 counties, is the unit for majorities and minorities, not an artificially chosen 6 Counties set up and protected as a British puppet state...

ALDERSHOT, FEBRUARY 1972

The response of the Left is dealt with in the following article. Of groups orientating to the labour movement and the working class, only Workers Fight defended the IRA's right to strike at military targets in Britain. The IMG also defended the IRA - but the IMG then oriented to ultra-left students and petty bourgeois radicals.

THE KILLING of 5 innocent British working women in the Irish Republican Army bomb explosion at Aldershot is a tragedy which all sympathisers of the Irish Republican Army deeply regret. It was an accident caused by a mistake in the timing of a bomb, an accident regretted as bitterly by the Irish Republican Army as by us.

That was *one* of the tragedies of Aldershot. The personal one.

The other tragedy - the military and political one - was that the explosion failed in its objective to decimate the officer corps of the Parachute Regiment, which cold bloodedly butchered innocent working people in Derry on January 30.

That must be said clearly and without hypocrisy.

The bosses' press is making good use of this tragedy to wipe out the memory of Bloody Sunday. Socialists are not in business to help them by wringing our hands in

horror.

The IRA is the army of a people which is now being repressed and terrorised and part of whose country is forcibly occupied by the British Army. We recognise and defend the IRA's right to make war on the British state, and to attack legitimate military targets in Britain itself when and if it thinks useful or necessary.

Just to compare Derry with Aldershot is to see the vast difference between the two sides in this war.

On one side it is the continuation of a struggle for liberation that has lasted for centuries. On the other side it is a ruling class war of repression, state terror and increasingly indiscriminate slaughter.

In Derry 3 weeks ago the British Government took a cold decision to make a bloody example of peaceful and unarmed civilians and its soldiers carried out that policy with deadly efficiency.

At Aldershot the IRA chose a military target, intending to strike not even at ordinary soldiers — as they are entitled to do — but at the Top Brass of the regiment. The innocent civilians died by an accident of war, not, like those in Derry, as a result of a calculated decision by murdering capitalist politicians.

Only people whose feelings, instincts and ideas line them up on the side of the 'official' violence of the Tory state against those it oppresses can equate Aldershot with Derry.

Only a party like Her Majesty's loyal 'Labour' opposition, those who, when last in office, unleashed the Argyles and 'Mad Mitch' on the people of Aden, would help get the Tories off the hook over Derry by joining the chorus of hypocritical condemnation: not one Labour MP supported Bernadette Devlin in opposing the emergency legislation which was rushed through the Commons to place the stamp of 'legality' on the British Army terror — including the Derry massacre — in Ulster! No single one declined to endorse the Army in Ulster, even though they had all made the expected noises of horror over Derry only 3 weeks ago.

For these ladies and gentlemen of the Right and of the Left, everything revolves around the exchange of polite meaningless words, or equally meaningless 'angry' words, as they dance their quadrille and play musical chairs with the Tories in Parliament. But when the realities of power politics intrude then all of them, without exception, know their place, and know which side they are on.

The revolutionary left must also know which side it is on.

But already revolutionary socialists and 'Marxists' are mixing pious declarations that 'Heath' is really responsible for Aldershot with condemnations of 'terrorism'. This, for the ignorant, can be passed off as good Leninism.

But it has *nothing* in common with Marxism or Leninism.

By 'terrorism' Marxists understand isolated acts of violence — often acts of despair — by small groups or individuals cut off from the masses, without the support of the masses, attempting to substitute minority action for mass action and usually having the effect of holding back mass action.

This is in no sense the case in Northern Ireland today, where the mass of the nationalist population actively support the IRA, provide it with all the help and recruit it needs, and look to it as their weapon, their militia.

The IRA backs up the Civil Rights mobilisations, the civil disobedience campaigns, the rent strike: without its protection these 'peaceful' mass actions could no

stand up to the state. Far from the IRA holding back mass action, the civil disobedience movement is inconceivable without the IRA. And the IRA, in its present phase, grew organically out of the mass movement of the nationalists.

The IRA tactic of bombings, ambushes and shootings of individual soldiers and policemen are dictated by the overwhelming strength of the British military machine, not because they lack mass support. This is not terrorism as Marxists have understood it and condemned it (though of course defending and supporting the terrorists against the state, and defending the right of even individual terrorists to fight against the imperialist state): it is guerilla warfare.

The IRA is not a terrorist organisation. Incidents like Aldershot are not terrorist exercises in any Marxist definition of the terms.

The pompous self-styled 'Marxists' who seize on a superficial resemblance in tactics between the present guerilla war of the IRA and acts of individual terror are not pillars of Marxist rectitude but mealy-mouthed dilettantes, hiding behind a misunderstood, misapplied and utterly emasculated 'Marxism'.

They take sides 'vigorously' and with aggressive 'firmness' after a Derry massacre – and then draw back smartly and put safe distance between themselves and the IRA when an Aldershot tragedy occupies the front page of the newspapers. That is, when it becomes vitally important *not* to flinch.

Both *Socialist Worker* and the *Workers Press* haven't just flinched: they have run for cover.

Riding its well-oiled weather-vane, IS once more swivels round a few degrees in response to the changed mood of public opinion. They 'support' the IRA – but not its right to strike at military targets in Britain!

The blinkered pedants of the SLL with their dehydrated 'British Trotskyism' quote Lenin attacking individual terrorism and pass it off as if he were attacking guerilla warfare like that in Ireland (of which Aldershot was an extension). They would turn one of the greatest of revolutionaries into a snivelling pacifist in self-justification – Lenin, who advocated and assisted the armed guerillas in 1905 and defended the 1916 Easter Rising against pseudo-Marxists who called it a putsch.

What *Workers Press* and *Socialist Worker's* designation of the IRA as terrorist, and their reaction to Aldershot, means is that they fear the effect on the average British worker. They fail to realise that a major part in fighting for socialist ideas in the working class is the fight against chauvinist, backward ideas.

Instead of standing firm against the backlash, they partially reflect it.

Instead of defending the right of the IRA to fight back, they use pseudo-Marxist arguments as a cop-out.

No British socialists have the right to tell the IRA not to take action – including retaliation for cold-blooded murder in Derry – against legitimate military targets in Britain. To do so for fear of the reaction of the British working class is to deny the right of an oppressed nation to fight for freedom.

It is not a main responsibility of the IRA, fighting against massive odds and an enemy with immense resources, to tailor its military tactics to make life easy for the British left.

It is *our* responsibility to confront the chauvinism and lack of understanding of layers of the British working class – and to fight to change it.

Socialist Worker and Workers Press, from fear of the anti-IRA backlash, turn themselves into muted expressions of such a backlash and thereby render themselves incapable of fighting the backlash effectively. In fact, in doing this, they themselves contribute to the backlash and become part of it.

The problem is not the 'terrorism' of the IRA but the failure of the British left to explain the justice of the Irish cause to the masses of the working class.

Socialist Worker and Workers Press evade the principled issue and obliquely pander to the chauvinism which they fear, using prefabricated 'Marxist' rationalisations against 'terrorism' as a cover.

The attack on the officers' mess showed that the IRA knows its enemy: not the British people but the ruling class and their armed and pampered mercenaries.

The IRA know their enemy. British labour must learn to know its friends and allies against the Tory ruling class.

We must refuse to allow that ruling class to use the tragic and accidental death of members of our class to justify its crimes in Northern Ireland.

And we must, above all, understand that the way to end the killings and the violence is to take sides with the IRA and help it to break the stranglehold which Britain still maintains on Ireland.

There is no other road to peace in Ireland but the defeat of British imperialism.

'BLOODY FRIDAY', JULY 1972

Shocked by the world-wide reaction to 'Bloody Sunday', and probably by the slaughter in Derry, the British government in March 1972 abolished Protestant 'Home Rule' in Northern Ireland and put the area under direct British rule. There followed a period in which British government ministers negotiated directly with the Provisional IRA. There were ceasefires and truces — everything seemed to be in the melting pot.

The Official IRA (from which both the present-day Workers Party and the INLA/IRSP derive) was forced to declare a ceasefire, which proved permanent, by a large hostile demonstration of Catholic women in Derry against them after they shot a local boy, 18 years old, on a visit to his parents from British Army service.

The Provisional IRA was far more flexible, more sensible, and less bloodthirsty about such things: they made great capital and made the British look small by comparison when they captured and then released a high-ranking British Army officer.

Then after the ceasefire broke down came 'Bloody Friday'. 26 explosions in Belfast killed 11 people and injured 130. Seven died when a bomb exploded in a crowded bus station, and four by an explosion in a shopping centre. Of the 11, two were soldiers. The dispute about whether warnings were given or heeded is referred to in the excerpt.

This gave the British the political conditions they needed to smash down the barricades which had once again gone up in Derry and Belfast after Bloody Sunday. In 'Operation Motorman' they smashed down the Catholic self-defence barricades. Among other consequences, this opened the way over the next 18 months to an orgy of sectarian assassinations of Catholics by Protestants.

THE IRA, and our attitude to it, has again become the touchstone for serious opponents in England of the Tory Government and its policies. Seizing on the revulsion produced by the Belfast bombings as justification, the British Army is stepping up its offensive against the IRA. Already it has invaded part of Catholic Belfast, which led to the mass protest evacuation of thousands of working class

families.

More invasions are likely. A bloody invasion of Free Derry could well be on the cards, now that the plans to build a 'Berlin Wall' around the Bogside have had to be abandoned. Certainly there will be a move back to British Army terrorisation of the Catholic areas in operations to 'weed out' the IRA – that is, to break the will of the Catholic population to go on supporting the IRA.

58 people are already undergoing 'deep interrogation' by the torturers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, following a big round-up. A massive rise in the number of internees is probable.

British socialists must be clear on what the issues are.

Horror at the blitz in Belfast will be widespread. This bloody holocaust of ordinary people is intended by the IRA to pressurise the British Government and the Army – that is, to influence the callous men responsible for the situation in the first place. But the Tories are only too glad to exploit the revulsion and the horror at such slaughter as in Belfast to manipulate the two sides, Protestant and Catholic, even to the point of civil war, in order to keep control of the Northern Ireland situation and ensure that the only changes are those that *they* want.

The brief truce broke down because of intolerable provocation by the UDA and the British Army. Ever since Direct Rule, the Army – supposedly the great peace-keeper, keeping apart the Green and Orange forces – has allowed the Orange gangs, the Unionist supremacists of the UDA, to drill openly and arm openly. The licensed killers of the British Army, some of them roaming around as freelance plain-clothes gangs, joined the UDA in the assassination of suspected republicans. Nor is it a secret that the UDA heavily overlaps with the Ulster Defence Regiment, officially part of the British Army, in men, officers, and even equipment.

Immediately the military pressure of the IRA campaign was withdrawn, Ringmaster Whitelaw began to bend under UDA pressure, hardening against the Catholics Catholics.

It is important to grasp *why* the situation 'deteriorated' so quickly after the truce. The British policy of balancing within the fixed and unquestionable framework of the 6 Counties meant that the heaviest weight in the Six Counties see-saw (the Orange weight, for whose advantage the 6 County balance was arranged in the first place) reasserted itself inexorably.

Having got their ceasefire with the Provisional IRA, the issue was posed to Whitelaw and the government: stand up to the UDA. That would have meant, unavoidably, *breaking* the framework, questioning the 6 Counties. Instead they turned on the Catholics, almost as if to spare the UDA the trouble of doing so. The policy of 'balance' *within the 6 Counties* demanded it.

The confrontation at Lenadoon Avenue, with the Army ramming a removal van rehousing refugee Catholics, was as far as the IRA was prepared to allow that to go without hitting back.

The ruthlessness of the IRA is a product of decades of repression within the artificial Orange state, carved out by imperialist violence against the will of 40% of its people and of 75% of the whole Irish people. The Catholic masses – and their militia – have been driven to a desperate once-and-for-all battle to break the Partition

framework. The Northern Ireland Catholics fight in isolation, in the most unfavourable condition 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.

Nevertheless they have risen in the last three years with tremendous audacity and courage...

We emphatically support the cause of the IRA and their right to fight the British Army and its allies with every weapon they have, both defensively and 'offensively'. Of all the British socialist groups we most emphatically defended the right of the IRA to strike at military targets in Britain itself, and endorsed the attack on Aldershot barracks, despite the accidental deaths of civilians. We have not changed this position.

Those in Britain who cover for the British Army assassination squads, and now yet again for the RUC torture squads, should shut up about the IRA 'murder gangs' and 'terrorists'. However, there are limits to the silence imposed by the political responsibility — indeed the moral duty — to stand apart from the anti-IRA hypocrites. Support for the IRA against British imperialism and its military allies cannot exclude criticism when they indiscriminately bomb civilians...

CORRECTION

IN THE LAST issue Workers Fight criticised the Irish Republican Army for indiscriminately bombing civilians. At the time of writing information was very scanty and we believed that the Belfast bombings were preceded by no warnings worth speaking about. We now know that in fact warnings of an hour or more were given to a number of agencies in Belfast and were, *certainly*, in the hands of the army in plenty of time to evacuate the area.

Why were they not evacuated? Why were the warnings suppressed? Why did the authorities allow the bombs to explode in areas crowded with people?

The Belfast bombings gave the Army a much-desired public 'justification' to invade the no-go areas which the Catholic victims of police and army terror had erected in self-defence.

If William Whitelaw had written the scenario he couldn't have found one better calculated for his aims. The suspicion is inescapable that the Army brass which had an iron grip on Belfast before and during the bombing consciously desired the bloody carnage as a propaganda weapon against the IRA.

These men are, after all, the butchers of Derry, responsible for shooting down 13 unarmed civilians in January.

The real criticism of the IRA is that its current tactics lend themselves to such use by the Army and are, even with warnings, largely indifferent to the effects on ordinary people. As such they are self-defeating. The line at which damage to the economy and the rulers of Northern Ireland merges with the help they give to the Army by provoking the Protestant workers and *demoralising* many Catholics is increasingly difficult to distinguish.

But in criticising the Republicans' tactics in their struggle, we must be absolutely clear that our basic attitude is support for them in that struggle, for the self-determination of Ireland and against British imperialism.

'MARXISM & TERRORISM'

Most of the 'revolutionary left' took refuge, when the bombs went off at Aldershot, in a pedantic pseudo-Marxist condemnation of 'individual terrorism'. This was not at all a proper description of what was happening in Northern Ireland or of its spill-overs into Britain. Workers Fig it tried in a number of articles to clarify the issues: the following was printed together with translations of two short comments by Rosa Luxemburg on real acts of individual terrorism — against a Tsarist official and, in 1916, against the Austrian prime minister by the prominent Austrian socialist, Friedrich Adler.

THE STRUGGLE in Ireland set the cat of reality among the complacent pigeons of the revolutionary movement. For a long time they had got along with statements of sympathy for various forms of armed struggle — so long as they were a long way off. Suddenly the British revolutionary movement showed it was 'British' first and 'revolutionary' second. And nothing showed it as well as their reaction to the bombing of the Aldershot barracks last March.

All at once the theoretical paralytics of the Socialist Labour League, the International Socialists and the 'Militant' rooted about for excuses to condemn the action. Their united cry: it was terrorism, and terrorism is opposed to Marxism, and therefore Marxists opposed terrorism.

Not only was this an absurd blanket statement and an illogical one at that, but it did not tackle the real matter at hand. What we were witnessing in the case of Aldershot was not terrorism at all — it was an episode in a war between one community with its militia and imperialism. To confuse this with terrorism is to miss the whole point — the political point of the matter. War is a systematic use of terror by the army of one nation, class, or community against another. Systematic terrorism is a line of struggle of the oppressed within a society against the oppressor members of that society or their agents. Marxists believe that *effective* struggle against oppression must always depend on the activity and consciousness of the masses, and consequently are opposed to terrorism if it substitutes for mass action.

To confuse war, simply because it is of an urban or rural guerilla type, with terrorism, is to lapse into identifying the character of political strategy by the technique involved. But if this confusion is serious — and it is — it is nothing to the confusion of groups like IS on Aldershot. This group, always eager to 'free Marxism from sterile dogmatism', ends up freeing reportage from all truth. The Aldershot bombing was described by them as 'individual assassination' (in a reply to a critical letter to their paper).

More like collective asininity — on IS's leaders' part! How can the attack by a detachment of one army on the barracks of another in a war be thought of as 'individual assassination'?

The translation of these articles by Rosa Luxemburg should help to set the record straight on the question of terrorism — particularly for the self-proclaimed disciples of Rosa Luxemburg in IS.

On 21st October 1916, Friedrich Adler, son of Victor Adler the leader of the Austrian Labour Party, and himself a prominent member, assassinated the Prime Minister of Austria. In her brilliant article on this event, Rosa Luxemburg looks at what she calls "the ineluctable law of cause and effect". The assassination could not, she argues, be seen outside of the context of "the unbroken shadow of suffering and hopelessness"... and that "everywhere the cry of the oppressed is stifled by the stranglehold of tyranny". "It was this semi-Asiatic atmosphere", with the utter betrayal of the workers by their leaders, that caused the event.

Similarly, in her two articles on the Russian terrorist movement, 'Terror' and 'On the question of terrorism', she points out that once the mass movement has got underway — the second of these articles was written immediately after the great march on the Winter Palace of 1905 that marked the beginning of the revolutionary wave in Russia — the matter must be considered differently.

As "terror as a systematic method of political struggle was the historical product of pessimism" and there were no longer grounds for any pessimism, it was at best an anachronistic method — one no longer suited to the situation and the times. But this understanding did not lead her to condemn terror even at that period in the blanket ignorant way of our comrades on the left. "This doesn't mean that individual acts of terror are neither useful nor significant any more", she says. The point is that they are part not of systematic terrorism but of systematic mass action. They can be a part of this, though always a subordinate part.

Let us take an example from our times, the so-called Munich massacre. This was carried out by the 'Black September' movement, which draws its very name from the date of the pulverising defeat sustained by the Palestinian fedayeen at the hands of Britain's dainty butcher, the Jordanian King Hussein. Its name is its essence: pessimism.

With that we make an observation but not a judgment. Of course, for those with their snouts in the trough of the welfare state and broad civil rights, pessimism, the endless arctic midnight of despair that comes from a defeat like that of September 1970, is unknown. When we point out then that the Black September movement was born out of pessimism we do not presume to scoff at this or the weaknesses of the Palestinian liberation movement. On the contrary, these observations must serve to make us all the more determined to fight for their cause, to strengthen their movement as much as we can and to resist all the more any concessions to Zionism.

Marxist support of the line of mass struggle is no excuse for any ignorance or ultimate pessimism on this question. We cannot say that we only support when it is mass struggle, or even that we always criticise when it isn't. After all, after the defeat of September what mass struggle could there be? Making it an absolute condition of support shows a total indifference to and an essentially imperialist disdain of the difficulties of struggle in the context of bloody reaction.

And the well-circulated argument that Marxists should oppose terror because it gives the ruling class an opportunity to justify repression is nonsense. Do its advocates suppose that the ruling class is incapable of organising agents provocateurs?

The second element in this relationship of the development of the mass move-

ment to terrorism is the question of response. In November 1963 someone, probably Lee Harvey Oswald, shot President Kennedy of the USA. Now no one can doubt that Kennedy's well-manicured hands were in fact indelibly stained with the blood of millions of Indochinese people; no-one who is willing to open his eyes can fail to see in Kennedy imperialism's number one butcher.

The fact that butchers don't wear their blood-stained aprons to cocktail parties doesn't hide their true profession. So killing him might be compared to the assassination of Sergius Romanov by the Socialist-Revolutionary Kaliaiev in February 1905. The movement in Russia was of course massively more developed as a truly mass affair than in the America of 1963.

The essential difference lies in the response.

Although Kennedy was guilty of far more heinous crimes than 'the vampire of Moscow', the action of his assassination had the effect of outraging the sympathies of the working class. In other words, if terrorism is systematic and therefore to be judged as a tactic, then the act must speak for itself. If an action is to be its own advocate it must fall on receptive ears. We can be sure that Sergius Romanov's killing did that! As Rosa Luxemburg says, "these responses are so natural to any civilised person".

The military action of the IRA, which we support, needs to have a 'base and favourable response' within the Catholic/Nationalist population, rather than the British working class. This is fundamental. When one nation oppresses another, as Britain oppresses Ireland, as the French oppressed Algeria, as the 'Israelis' oppress the Palestinians, the oppressed are *not* required to scruple about the sensibilities of the oppressor nation. After all, are the Vietnamese to scruple over whether they offend American sensibilities in their inspiring heroic struggle? Were the tortured and maimed Algerians to take care not to outrage the 'civilised' standards of the French? No! Of course not!

If you confuse terrorism within a single community and warfare between communities or nations then it follows that you will confuse precisely *whose* response it is that is being sought. If it is an act of terrorism then it must relate to the sensibilities of the oppressed of that community.

One hardly asks for acts of warfare to be sympathetically received by the enemy army or the citizens of the opposing state. The mind boggles at such a concept of war!

And yet... Socialist Worker on March 11th 1972 writes, "We have to be critical of (the IRA's tactics) when they attempt to substitute individual assassinations (!) for the building of a mass movement in Britain" (our emphasis). Truly a gem of confused idiocy!

In a frenetic attempt to treat the event as 'individual assassination', IS went on to say, "For every army officer killed in Britain, the Tories have a thousand replacements". Well, one might equally write, "for all the army officers killed *anywhere in the world...*" Why Britain? For the same reason that the first condemnation of 'terrorism' appeared when that 'terrorism' crossed the Irish Sea and had the audacity to intrude on IS's peaceful preserve.

But what of the general sentiment? It is a sentence taken out of the vocabulary of

terrorist attacks on selected persons – politicians and the like – not out of the vocabulary of descriptions of war against oppressor armies.

The true faith of the revolutionary has always been expressed in the line, "If I die, a thousand will spring up to take my place". IS, having stood theory and reality on their heads, now proceeds to do the same with sentiment: totally inverting it. Socialist Worker gives us the very essence of pathetic, demoralised defeatism.

Where forces of occupation, or, even more, settler-societies are involved, there does seem at an extremely superficial view to be a coincidence of terrorism and war.

Look at a case like Cyprus. There the British press was full of cries about the 'terrorist'. In fact, there was simply a war going on between the force of occupation and the popular militia of 'irregulars'. What was being attempted was not the overthrow of a state but the ousting of a force of occupation. If servicing units of the army, like teachers at the army schools, or the families of servicemen, get killed, it is because they are a part of the garrison of occupation in a war.

In Algeria and Kenya we saw wars of liberation against a garrisoned army plus a local settler class. This settler class in each case was organically tied to imperialism as a 'community' and was opposed by 'the people' demanding freedom.

In case of Israel we see a society which for all its class divisions, etc. still forms in relation to the Palestinians a distinct and organic community. Of course there are a courageous few revolutionary activists sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, but the central determining reality is that of a united Zionism against the Palestinian forces and *not* the divisions within Israel.

The tactics of the warfare used by the Palestinian refugees and their armed forces against Israel may have appeared to be technically similar to terrorism between the periods of full-scale conventional war, as in June 1967, but were in fact episodes in an ongoing guerilla-type war.

After September 1970, however, such was the decimation of the Palestinian forces at the hands of Hussein that the subsequent armed actions were no longer in the context of a war. They became courageous but futile acts of desperation in the main.

The clearest of these was the sheer lunacy of the Lod airport massacre. Only the blackest despondency could give rise to an event of such irrational and aimless fury. Indeed the fact that it was a group of Japanese 'revolutionaries' that carried it out was perhaps the most convincing sign of the totality of the defeat suffered by the Palestinians and the radical moral and political degeneration that prevailed in a part of a once vigorous movement.

In contrast to this there have been hi-jackings and incidents like the Munich massacre which are tactics devoted to a definite end: usually the freeing of prisoners held by the oppressor. There have been many successes for this tactic which is valuable given its limited aims. It has not been put forward as either a tactic to win a war or overthrow a government.

Many of the reports of the activity of the 'guerilla' groups in South America, however, show a strange idea of the idea of popular response and mass participation.

An Argentinian group, for instance, recently kidnapped the executive of a meat-packing factory, agreeing to free him if they were given money and meat – or the

people.

Ironically, it is precisely this final touch, this 'orientation to the workers', which is wrong. The whole action smacks of the 'benefactor' approach. The response of the workers is seen to be their passive applauding of the act, and their participation is limited to the receipt of meat parcels.

It is precisely such acts which induce passivity in the masses. The workers and peasants learn to await the 'avenging hand' of the 'deliverer'. This is the basic danger of terrorism *as a strategy*: despite (usually) the intentions of the terrorist, it effectively sees the revolution taking place with the participation of no-one but the elite of the terrorist group, who like Robin Hoods now give the poor the state (rather than meat parcels) that they have stolen from the rich.

PRESS STATEMENT, SEP. 1973

Early on the morning of September 25 1973, after the second wave of bombings in London, Workers Fight headquarters was raided by half a dozen plain clothes police, a couple of the armed.

25th September 1973 - EARLY THIS MORNING the headquarters of the Trotskyist Workers' Fight organisation was raided by seven Special Branch detectives, acting on a warrant secured under the Criminal Damages Act from Bow Street Magistrates Court, dated 24.9.73. They removed a large number of addresses, including an address book, the full list of subscribers to our publications, and even an old list of subscribers to the quarterly journal Workers' Republic, which Workers Fight formerly produced when it was part of the now defunct Irish Workers Group.

This raid, insignificant though it be compared with daily happenings in Northern Ireland, is to our knowledge the first full raid and search of the headquarters of any revolutionary organisation here. It is only the latest example of the increasing harassment and attempted intimidation of those in Britain who support the Irish Republican Army against the army of the British ruling class.

Workers Fight holds that the British Army has no right to be in Ireland. The IRA, the militia of the oppressed Catholic population, has every right to fight to drive them out of Ireland by force, and to call for the support of those in the British labour movement who believe in Ireland's right to self-determination.

Logically it has the right to take the war against the forces of the British Government into Britain itself. In principle we support its right to do what it thinks necessary. If there were no British soldiers in Ireland there would be no bombs in English cities, whether they are being planted by Republicans or by agents of the Tory government to discredit Republicans in the eyes of the British working class.

However, we are not entirely convinced that the bombings, or all the bombings, are the work of republicans or their sympathisers. Since the most likely beneficiaries of a sporadic bombing campaign in Britain will be the British government, there is no reason why that Government, whose agents set off bombs in Dublin last December to help push anti-IRA legislation through the Dail, should not do the same in London.

Whoever is responsible, and while we believe that if the Republicans are respons-

ible they are making a tactical mistake, we reaffirm our active support for and solidarity with the IRA against the British Army.

For us the enemy is in Downing Street, the City of London and the boardrooms of firms like Chrysler and other capitalist firms. The British ruling class and the Tory government are the enemy of both the British workers and the Irish people.

Workers Fight will continue to do its best to explain this viewpoint to the growing number of British workers who are prepared to listen to it.

THE BIRMINGHAM BOMBINGS,

NOV. 1974: 1) EDITORIAL

In November 1974 bombs were set off in two discotheque pubs in the centre of Birmingham, with terrible carnage. Precisely who was responsible is not clear — probably those now in jail for it were framed. But no informed opinion today that I know of questions that Republicans of some sort were responsible. Feeling had been running high in the Irish community after an IRA hunger striker, Michael Gaughan, died in jail. David O'Connell, then believed to be chief of staff of the IRA, publicly claimed not to know who was responsible but admitted it could have been Republicans. (WF reprinted his statement).

There followed a powerful backlash against the Irish community in Britain and against socialists. A member of Workers Fight, John Bryant, was driven out of his job at a Birmingham engineering factory, sacked on the demand of the stewards' committee. The Labour government brought in the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and many Irish people were deported.

The revolutionary left condemned the bombing. The IMG varied the condemnation in a weak and pettifogging article written by Tariq Ali ('Clarissa Howard') which tried to evade the issue by denying that Republicans were or might have been responsible.

WF's response was entirely in line with the principle we outlined early in 1972, when, alone on the left except the IMG, we supported the IRA's right to strike at the officers' mess at Aldershot.

Lawrie White, whose criticism of Workers Fight is reprinted here, was a prominent IMG'er (ex-SLL) who later went on to greater things: he was the leader of the IMG Spartacist group a couple of years ago.

THE EXPLOSIONS in two Birmingham pubs last Thursday night were probably the work of Irish republicans. They were deliberate and presumably calculated acts of indiscriminate slaughter of civilians — people in no way directly connected with the war in Ireland.

Revolutionary socialists, especially those who solidarise with the IRA, have a duty to denounce and condemn this indefensible and senseless slaughter.

Workers Fight has consistently supported the Irish republican struggle, including the right of the IRA to strike at military targets in Britain. We continue to side with the republicans. We defend their right to fight to liberate their country from the terror regime imposed by the British ruling class and its army in Northern Ireland.

But last Thursday's explosions are simply indefensible on any grounds — military, political or moral. Unless they were the result of a ghastly series of miscalculations, they signal an entirely new departure. So far, civilian casualties have been by-products of attacks on military or economic targets, *never the objective*. Random slaughter of civilians, with bombs and bullets, has been the work of the Orange

bigots protected by the British Army, and sometimes the work of the Army itself and its underground SAS units.

Self-evidently, the Birmingham explosions have no *military* value to the republican cause. Even the bombings at Guildford, however horrifying, hit at British Army personnel who would soon have been terrorising the Northern Ireland Catholics. And most of the bombings in Northern Ireland have had the rational military objective of striking at the *economy* of Northern Ireland.

But the Birmingham bombings are of no such character.

The Birmingham bombings are indefensible politically, too. In fact they are politically very stupid. They may have been intended to help create mass feeling in Britain for British army withdrawal. But they are far more likely to consolidate opinion behind the government. They have already led to a mushrooming growth of the extreme right, the British allies of the UDA. As long ago as the Second World War, it was shown that civilian populations are *not* swayed by a bombing blitz, even such obliteration bombing as the RAF carried out in Dresden.

Because such methods are militarily and politically futile and indefensible, they are also morally indefensible. Is it really necessary to match the barbarism of the ruling class in its callous slaughter of civilians?

The republican attitude is the product of years of brutalisation by the British Army. They live amidst Army terror, torture, concentration camps, and sometimes straight random murder by the Army. The criminal indifference of the British people to the Army's murderous jackboot rule in Northern Ireland is part of the process of brutalisation. But even if we understand the cause, we cannot approve the result.

We cannot expect or demand that the IRA trim its attacks on military or state targets to what the British working class would 'understand': all the more so as the British working class has signally failed to understand or sympathise with the republicans' struggle.

Nevertheless, the labour movement is *potentially* an ally, even a decisive one, of the republicans. To explain to militant British workers why the IRA has a right to fight the British Army and to attack it in Britain — that is part of the battle to emancipate British workers from chauvinism and *make them* into allies of the republican struggle. That is the job of British revolutionaries, whatever the difficulties. And it is possible. But it is impossible to 'explain' or justify indiscriminate and senseless slaughter such as in Birmingham. Such slaughter can only, *needlessly*, push the potential allies of republicanism into the arms of the British ruling class. *Subjected to random attack on the basis of their nationality, their chauvinism is reinforced.*

The carnage in Birmingham has not merely brought the full horror of war into Britain. It also threatens to bring into the British working class the deep divisions and communal hatreds that have crippled and poisoned the Northern Ireland working class.

Revolutionaries in Britain have never had any reason to support the IRA bar one — it, and it alone, was leading a war of liberation against 'our own' ruling class. The talk common in sections of the left about 'Provo-fascists' was and is slanderous or ignorant nonsense. Nevertheless their politics are not our politics. *Support* has meant

support against our own ruling class and its army: it did not imply *political* support.

Now, conversely, opposition to the apparent new turn towards hitting civilian targets does not imply or necessitate any basic change in our position of solidarity with the republican struggle: they are still fighting a just war against 'our own' imperialism.

We condemn; we do not change sides.

Any soldier fighting in an army to whose cause he is totally committed might utterly object to some tactic or action and find it indefensible — without abandoning his cause, and certainly without joining up with the enemy. It is in that spirit that we say: we condemn the Birmingham bombing; and we remain fully committed to the cause of an independent socialist Ireland, and in solidarity with those now leading the fight for Irish independence.

In the final analysis, the British government and ruling class are responsible for the bombings in Birmingham, as they are directly responsible for the terror in Northern Ireland. Britain simply has no right to be in Ireland; the IRA is fighting a just war to get it out. Either the IRA will win that war and unify Ireland, or the republican population will be beaten down *for now*. But there will doubtless be a new uprising after an interval — as there always has been following Britain's bloody victories over the Irish in the past.

There is only one *solution*: a united, independent Ireland with internal autonomy for the Protestant minority.

The duty of socialists in Britain is clear:

- a) Firmly dissociate from any bombing campaign aimed at the civilian population
- b) Maintain and fight for a position of continued solidarity with the IRA,
- c) Defend civil liberties in Britain. Emergency powers against the IRA will be used against the whole working class. Police power to hold 'suspects' for seven days at their mercy will apply not only to IRA 'suspects' but to militant pickets, demonstrators, etc in the class struggles that are imminent.

d) Stand against the inevitable backlash that will hit the pro-republican left and probably the whole Irish community in Britain.

e) We must point out the inconsistencies, the hypocrisies and the double standards. Workers in the Midlands have struck and demonstrated over the Birmingham explosions, but they never turned a hair over the slaughter of 13 unarmed civilians in Derry; nor the hundreds of sectarian murders (almost entirely of Catholics, and over two dozen in the past month alone) made possible by British Army action to suppress the Catholics' self-defence; nor over the concentration camps existing within the 'UK' for 3½ years; nor the British Army terror in Belfast, nor the monstrous injustice of the Orange state, which has been the precondition for all these horrors.

The torn and smashed bodies of kids in a discotheque pub are terrible to contemplate. But are they more terrible to contemplate than the mangled bodies of children smashed by British armoured cars in Belfast, women blinded by rubber bullets fired in their faces, babies or old people choked by CS gas, or unarmed people shot down in cold blood by the British Army? Only if viewed through nationalist spectacles.

The problem for the British left is to cut through the instinctive nationalist reflexes which are now producing a pro-government and anti-Irish backlash. The past cow-

ardly evasions of the left over Ireland, its outright capitulation to chauvinism over the Common Market (and the previous indifference of the labour movement to anti-colonial struggles) are now catching up with it – wearing 7-league boots. Fascists organisations like the National Front are growing and able to enlist large-scale support on the Irish issue.

We must insist on the ruling class's responsibility for the war and *all* its consequences, and continue to stress the fundamental justice of the republican struggle. This is the only possible basis on which to hope to stand against the present hysteria.

Finally, we must demand and campaign for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland, and oppose British support for either the Orange para-military forces, or for any future 6 County state.

2) A LETTER AND A REPLY

THE FRONT page article in WF78 on the Birmingham bombings makes the correct point that the criticisms Trotskyists make of the IRA should be made clearly in the context of support for the struggle against British imperialism.

However, this is precisely what the very same article fails to do.

It begins by asserting that "Revolutionary socialists... have a duty to denounce (!) and condemn this indefensible and senseless slaughter". And indeed the whole article was littered with such emotive terms: the "carnage" was "callous", "impossible to 'explain' or justify", "simply indefensible on any grounds – military, political or moral", etc. etc.

What has happened, comrades! Is it the first time in history that civilians have been killed in a war? Did Workers Fight "denounce and condemn" the Vietnamese NLF's attacks on civilian targets in puppet-controlled areas as "indefensible and senseless"? Did Workers Fight ever spend so much space waxing horror-struck over UVF pub-bombings in the Six Counties, or over the British provocateurs' bombing in Dublin, for that matter?

Of course not! Because the first duty of revolutionaries is to distinguish between the violence of the oppressor and the violence of the oppressed. The first duty of revolutionaries is to denounce and condemn the indefensible hypocrisy of the imperialist state and all its allies in the press and TV. (The deliberate indiscriminate fire-bombing of the entire city of Dresden in the last war is worthy of more than a mere aside, comrades!)

But on the Birmingham bombings, the hypocrisy you chose to condemn is that of "the workers in the Midlands". Physician heal thyself! How can you demand that the masses see through the hypocrisy of the anti-IRA hysteria whipped up by the press when you yourselves make no attempt whatsoever to unmask it, but in fact merely reinforce it by repeating the same expressions of horror?

But worse. You also join in the universal attribution of responsibility for the bombings to Irish republicans. You say they were "probably the work of Irish republicans".

Where is the evidence for this statement? Admittedly at the time of going to press you may not have heard the news of the Provos' denial of responsibility. But even without that, what excuse can there be for your statement?

You say yourselves that you cannot see any sense in the bombings. They seem "politically very stupid". If the work of the IRA, they would "signal an entirely new departure". Well then, where is the logic in attributing them to the IRA? Isn't it obvious that there might be something wrong with the premise if the conclusion doesn't make sense? Especially when you know very well, even if the workers in the Midlands don't, that the bombings are copy-book examples not of what the IRA is accustomed to doing, but of what the extreme unionist forces like the UVF regularly do in the north of Ireland. (And we should note that if the bombings were a right wing provocation, they were by no means "politically very stupid").

The real lesson of the Birmingham bombings is that the British bourgeoisie have demonstrated that if someone lets off a couple of bombs they can rapidly disorientate the workers' movement and open it up to extreme right wing agitation through a press campaign blaming the IRA. And under cover of the hysteria thus whipped up, they can introduce draconian legislation planned weeks in advance.

This means that our first duty is not to "firmly (!) dissociate (ourselves) from any bombing campaign aimed at the civilian population", but to firmly dissociate ourselves first and foremost from the anti-IRA campaign of the British ruling class.

And you don't do that simply by re-stating your general position on the IRA. It is the concrete situation that you have to confront. It is not possible to disarm the bourgeoisie of its ideological weapons if we do not first train revolutionary cadre to recognise and to resist them. It is this essential task that your editorial failed to carry out.

LAWRIE WHITE

HOW LAWRIE White concludes that we fail to place criticism of the IRA within the context of the struggle against imperialism is rather a mystery.

We have been advised by the NCCL that the editorial he criticises would be illegal now within the terms of the Jenkins police state law!

The only logic to his outpouring is that condemnation of the Birmingham bombings and acceptance of the 'probable' responsibility of 'Irish republicans' outweighed the four fifths of the article that made the basic case for the republican cause! (But we can't please him there either, since he upbraids us for attacking the double standards of British workers in the Midlands who struck work over the bombings, but never bother about the terror by the British army in Ireland...) When he says that we never spent as much space expressing horror at the UVF-UDA assassinations and the British army terror, it means he's not been reading the paper or that he is indulging in shoddy and dishonest polemics.

He says that the *first* duty is to denounce the imperialists for their hypocrisy: we think that there are other priorities, like *explaining* as often as necessary what the republicans fight for; but whatever the *first* duty of revolutionaries in Britain may be, it is clear that Lawrie White sees denouncing hypocrisy as the *only* duty here and now.

At one and the same time he elevates denial of possible Republican responsibility into a principle it is treason to depart from in the 'concrete situation', and goes on to talk about the 'first duty' being to 'distinguish between the violence of the oppressors and the violence of the oppressed'. So does White think the bombings were 'probably' or even 'possibly' the work of 'the oppressed'... some republicans,

perhaps? Even if he has so far kept the dreadfully heretical thought locked in his subconscious, clearly he does think so, for at least it has escaped into his letter, if obliquely.

If there be any sense in the letter and if it is other than a piece of IMG sniping (or sniping by a member of the IMG not very happy with the way the line of that organisation has wobbled on the issue of solidarity with the Republicans in the last year), it can only be the belief that 'the IRA' are never to be criticised, at least in 'military' matters, and if they do, or may have done, something that is indefensible, then the best policy for British revolutionaries who are in general solidarity with them is to copy the three wise monkeys and hear, see and say nothing.

White is correct to say that revolutionaries in Britain must fight the bourgeois ideological domination of the working class — specifically, the chauvinism on the Irish question. But for him, the essence of 'disarming the bourgeoisie' of its ideological weapons against the working class comes down to... *denial* that Irish republicans might indeed have been responsible for the Birmingham bombings! That is a very limited, not to say peculiar and bizarre, conception of the nature and depth of the chauvinist disease in the British working class, of the present situation, and of the tasks of revolutionaries.

How do we disarm the bourgeoisie of its ideological weapons in this case? It is certainly not done by a Workers Press-type panic-stricken scream of 'No! — it couldn't have been the republicans, it wasn't the IRA'. Because *it might well have been* republicans. It might well have been elements of the republican population from northern Ireland who, in their justified bitterness and outrage at the British terror, reacted in such a politically senseless, but quite understandable, way.

Our article referred to 'Irish republicans', not any specific section of the IRA, and we would include in that term the smallest sub-grouping that takes up the fight in northern Ireland against British imperialism. The Provisionals are the main force fighting, but they have no exclusive licence to fight British imperialism (or to claim the solidarity of revolutionaries in Britain), nor are they the sole custodians of the right of the Irish people to fight British imperialism.

Isn't it contradictory, Lawrie White asks, to say the bombings were probably the work of republicans, if they were senseless from a republican point of view? Unfortunately not. White's talk of contradictions is abstract, purely formal logic. We are faced with the logic of the various forms of struggle employed by an oppressed people. Those forms of struggle are not, and can never be, neatly cut to shape in advance. It is entirely consistent with the desperate plight of the Catholics in northern Ireland that such an outbreak could occur, the work of isolated active service units, splinter groups, or previously inactive republican sympathisers.

David O'Connell no doubt 'dissociates' from the anti-IRA campaign of the British press. And he knows that any action such as the Birmingham bombings, by any section of the Catholic republican population, will be laid at the door of 'the IRA', that is, the Provisionals. Yet he condemned the bombings, disclosed that he *didn't* know whether or not some sections even of the Provisional IRA were responsible, said that if it were found that they were, there would be a court of inquiry and possibly courts martial — nor did he *wriggle* by over-stressing the no doubt real poss-

ibility that it was an anti-republican provocation. (See the last issue of Workers Fight for O'Connell's interview).

Unlike the weekly paper of White's own organisation, Red Weekly, the revolutionary nationalist leader had the guts and *the seriousness* to face the real possibility or probability that it was the work of republicans. He neither condoned it – nor did he change sides because of it! He condemns it, which is what we did and do. *And we don't change sides either.*

It is a short, though logical, step from resting one's supposed assault on British chauvinism and anti-IRA hysteria exclusively on saying it *wasn't* the IRA, to capitulation to that chauvinism. For it is implied in this weighty, Marxist, principled, non-hypocritical, firm, unflinching, unbending, r...r...revolutionary stance, that if it were really republicans then the general reaction to the bombings, at least, and maybe the wholesale condemnation of everything the IRA stands for, and the war it is fighting as well, are quite justified.

That is neither to disarm the bourgeoisie, nor to arm the working class ideologically. It is not even to face the issues squarely, with Marxist honesty – it is to hide in a corner. And that is what the IMG did. And from *this* lofty moral platform, Lawrie White delivers us a lecture on revolutionary seriousness and principles!

If the essence of 'disarming' the bourgeoisie is to deny IRA responsibility rather than to reassert the justice of the Republican cause *even if the Provisionals were entirely responsible for the bombs* – what happens to your credibility with serious workers who read your paper and place confidence in it, if it transpires, say as a result of the Provisional court of inquiry, that Republicans were responsible? What about the crucial problem of educating the vanguard of the British working class to distinguish between the fundamental issues in this war and the 'politics of the last atrocity' which, unfortunately, normally determine the ebbs and flows of working class opinion on it?

There is only one way to disarm the bourgeoisie and placate the anger – the justified anger – of the British working class: and that is to confront the reality as you see it. Don't try to be 'clever' and slippery. Take sides always according to the fundamental issues in the war; defend what can be defended; and if something occurs which you find indefensible – denounce it. Workers Fight wanted to face the issues squarely as we assessed them, and as they would appear to our readers.

We reiterated our pro-republican stand, irrespective of Birmingham.

Those, like the IMG, who nervously jumped for cover, placed in question what their whole attitude would be if it were shown to be a republican action. Far from arming their readers, they left them floundering with arguments that working class militants not trained in double-think would dismiss as contemptible evasions – and which, measured against the slaughter of 21 people and the maiming of over 180, were quite obscene.

Presumably Lawrie White wants to attack press hypocrisy to counter its influence, to talk, in the voice of revolutionary socialism, reasonably and honestly. The press deals wholesale in lies and distortions about Ireland, purveys anti-Irish racist double standards. They suppress and lie about the real facts of the northern Ireland situation. Yes: but in this case, when the press raged – hypocritically – it happened that

they merely articulated the feelings of the entire working class. *We agreed and agree with those feelings and we said why.* If one uses similar words and phrases, that simply means that the stock of language is limited. If White doesn't think the events in Birmingham cause for emotion and emotional terms, the mildest comment one can make is that he should examine the state of his emotions, not to speak of his imagination.

To let oneself be swayed by feelings of horror over civilian casualties like the women and two children killed in the M62 explosion is to lose all political balance.

Not to feel horror at senseless slaughter unconnected with any military objective is either to be personally unbalanced or to be thrown off balance in over-reaction to the hysteria.

Not to express those feelings, while maintaining the solidarity position, is to lose the possibility of even talking to ordinary British workers.

To present at length a full socialist view of the war in Ireland and to place responsibility with the British ruling class — that was to attack press hypocrisy. Workers Fight did exactly that. White grossly overestimates the influence of the press, however. There is no straight cause-and-effect relationship between mass chauvinism on Ireland and press coverage. Certainly the press buttresses chauvinism and makes the fight against it more difficult. But bourgeois ideological domination is much less shallow than simply being the effect of press bias, and certainly not simply related to this or that lie in the press *at any given moment*. Far more deeprooted, chauvinism combines decades of imperialist conditioning with the most primitive 'defend your home and local pub' gut responses — understandable responses.

To concentrate on condemning Government and press hypocrisy would in this case have been a mechanism for evading the reality of working class chauvinism, in the worst IS or WRP style. We tried to hit at the substance, not the shadow. The immediate ephemeral expression in the press *at that point in time* was the mere shadow of the all-pervasive double standards within the working class and the labour movement. We expect hypocrisy from the press; what we attempted was to hold a mirror up to our own class.

Events like Birmingham are, as we explained, a result of British partition, interference, and its present terror campaign in Ireland. Fundamental responsibility rests with the British state, as we said and repeat. The events in Birmingham must be seen within this context. *But they are events in their own right.* As such they demand a response.

Simply to duck the issue, as Red Weekly did with a pettifogging and evasive article by Clarissa Howard, or to take refuge behind *general* declarations about the *general* right of the Irish people to fight for independence, is petty bourgeois indecision and gutlessness.

In practical politics, this leads to mimicking and toadying the republicans — something very different from principled solidarity. With the Birmingham bombings, sycophancy towards the republicans and fear to take an independent judgment combined with the increasing tendency in Red Weekly to avoid sharp clashes with backward feelings in the working class, and produced a woolly and evasive response, which said nothing, did not educate, did not clarify.

It is possible, though by no means easy, rationally to explain the justice of the fight for Irish independence and all the things that flow from that, including attacks on military targets in Britain — even where some innocent victims suffer. Workers Fight has done that consistently and more outspokenly than any paper on the British left. We will continue to do it in future.

A recent incident will illustrate this. A WF militant was sacked in Birmingham during the wave of anti-IRA hysteria. Ironically, his first serious stand on Irish politics had been when he attempted to hit someone 18 months ago who sold him a copy of WF containing a pro-IRA article. In patient discussion he learnt the basic justice of the republican cause — because it is a just cause, one that can be rationally explained and argued.

But *how* do you explain, on any level, the Birmingham bombings? White would have us repeat, moron-like, banalities about 'civilians getting killed in a war'. (Such an attitude, incidentally, parts company from any communist attitude to the habitual slaughter of non-combattant civilians in modern warfare, expressed by Leon Trotsky when he talked about the "struggle against fascist atrocities, and imperialist atrocities in general, especially the fight against the bombing of peaceful cities", and went on to describe such things as 'criminal acts'. That was in January 1939. It is a measure of the brutalisation that has coarsened even revolutionary socialists that we should have to recall such elementary attitudes).

Are we being 'moralistic'? But what is 'moralism'? It is setting up abstract, timeless principles, and putting them *above the needs of the class struggle*. Since when has opposition to the useless slaughter of innocent working class civilians been a matter of abstract principles, and how is it counterposed to the class struggle?

We are not pacifists, nor do we subscribe to the Ten Commandments. But there is a socialist morality. We recognise that the class struggle and national liberation struggle is a merciless battle in which we will kill and be killed. But we do not on that account casually shrug off slaughter which serves no political or military purpose. It is for that reason that the bombings in Birmingham must be morally condemned according to the morality of communists who do recognise that the reality of class society imposes violence upon us.

The charge of moralism implies that one shares the caricature view that Marxists are a-moral.

For English revolutionaries to fear to bend under the pressure against the IRA is healthy and politically honourable. But it is essentially infantile and unthinking if it leads to the moral nihilism of an attitude to bombing civilians which is derived from the British RAF's 'Bomber Harris' and other professional imperialist butchers.

In their zeal to refuse to condemn such bombing (which they can hardly believe *could not* be the work of certain republicans or pro-republicans), such people *sland* the organised republican movement, which has a better and a more honourable record precisely because it is motivated by values different from those of the imperialist butchers who casually wipe out whole cities 'in order to save them'.

The attitude that would say, "one doesn't condemn, one simply says Birmingham was a mistake" is another contemptible evasion. We did refer to the possibility that the bombing might have been the result of a ghastly series of errors, if the Republic-

ans were responsible. Nevertheless, if what happened in Birmingham was the result of a conscious decision, then it was not a mistake but a crime against the British and Irish working class. And it was necessary to say so.

Revolutionary cadres are not just schoolboys playing rugby, trained to resist the pressure of the other side come what may. If revolutionaries are not trained to look at reality squarely and think independently, then they will prove useless.

The Red Weekly method of training cadres appears to be one of *ducking* the issue while making a fine pretence of principled politics and world-defying intransigence.

As opposed to this, the proletarian revolutionary organisation *thinks*, maintains its political independence, and either defends or rejects action by the revolutionary nationalists with whom it is in solidarity.

We denounced the Birmingham atrocity. Weighing what we denounced against the fundamental issues in the war, we then went on to reiterate our continued support for the republican side, in the same article which White attacks.

We affirm the right of the IRA to fight the British ruling class and their army, in Ireland or in Britain. And we affirm our right to condemn elements within or on the fringe of that movement if they are, or appear to be, in favour of indiscriminate and senseless slaughter of innocent British workers.

We judged the situation and took our position irrespective of the attitude of the Republican movement. As it happens, we afterwards learned that Provisional leader David O'Connell expressed a similar attitude.

The guerilla leader O'Connell knows that armed actions either have a purpose or they are senseless; either they are part of a strategy, or they are random and indefensible. He says that the Birmingham bombings are senseless and indefensible, differentiating between legitimate acts in a war of liberation and indiscriminate slaughter of civilians. (The vicarious, romantic sympathiser is of course free from such considerations, feels no responsibility, and instead of trying to talk intelligently to the potential allies of the republicans among the British working class, he takes refuge in 'tough guy' quips like White's "is this the first time civilians have been killed?")

We welcomed O'Connell's statement. But we would have maintained our position. We remain consistent.

And White and the IMG? If the Provisional IRA investigation which O'Connell announces leads to a trial by the Republicans (we deny the right of the British state to try such people, who should be treated as prisoners of war), will White remain consistent and consider the defendants in such a trial as victims of British hysteria effected within the IRA itself? (Thus intimating that the Provos are not 'hard', ruthless or 'callous' enough for their vicarious British sympathisers...) Or will they ditch their position of today, and come to agree with O'Connell - and Workers Fight?

CHELSEA, OCTOBER 1981

We reproduce the article here to allow comrades to refresh their memories. The article was arranged following an EC decision. As comrades will see, it does argue the basic justice of the IRA struggle, and does defend their right to strike at military targets.

JOHN O'MAHONY argues that our attitude to the conflict in Ireland cannot and should not be determined by the 'politics of the last atrocity'.

THE TARGET was a coachload of soldiers. But the major casualties were a 60 year old widow who died with a six inch nail through her heart and a youth who died three days later.

22 out of 23 soldiers on the coach were injured; so were 18 others, civilians walking in a Chelsea street. Some are seriously injured.

The bomb, a vanload of nails and bolts, was exploded in the crowded street by someone watching from 100 yards away, who was concerned only to get the passing soldiers and (at best) didn't give a damn about the people in the street.

Thus Mrs Thatcher's gory victory over the prisoners in Long Kesh boomeranged against innocent British civilians, and the Northern Ireland war returned to the streets of London last Saturday.

"This was the most brutal attack I have ever seen. I shall never, never give them political status — never", said Mrs Thatcher. Smugly, and somewhat gloatingly, she took the chance to tell people whose pricked consciences had begun to prise open their minds on the Irish question — 'I told you what they were like. I was right to let ten of them starve to death'.

Most British workers will be likely to agree with her — including many who had been forced to begin to think by the self-sacrifice of the hunger strikers.

This was no accident of war. When the IRA deliberately sets off a massive nail bomb in a crowded street, British workers will be likely to respond to indiscriminate maiming and risk of slaughter with nationalism and chauvinism.

Of course we can only condemn the setting off of bombs which are aimed at or which are likely to hit civilians. Saturday's bombing was against a military target — against members of the army which has repressed and brutalised the Catholics of Northern Ireland for ten years — but to get at it the IRA cut a swathe through a streetful of civilians. This is unjustifiable and indefensible, and it will not weaken the vicious Tory government but help them to rally British support for repression in Northern Ireland.

Between what happened in Chelsea and a Birmingham-scale slaughter there is a thin line of chance and accident.

But socialists must *[not let themselves be confused by the politics of the last]* * atrocity. We must not lose sight of the basic issues.

Incidents like Chelsea happen because of what successive British governments, Labour and Tory alike, have done to the Catholic community in Northern Ireland.

In the last six months they have marched and demonstrated in their tens of thousands for the hunger strikers. Not since internment has there been such massive Catholic mobilisation, or such unity.

They used all the channels. They voted 'for the hunger strikers' where the chance was offered, in Belfast city council elections as well as in Fermanagh/South Tyrone. They found it all counted for nothing.

The British government let one hunger striker after another waste and die. The mass of the British people didn't care. This fact must have branded itself in the mind

of every politically conscious Catholic in Northern Ireland.

It is now scarcely to be denied that the big majority of the half-million Six County Catholics actively or passively support the IRA and recognise the guerillas as theirs. It was the entire Catholic population, not the supposedly unrepresentative 'men of violence', who counted for nothing with the British government on the thing that mattered most to the Catholics.

The British government *dared* not concede the five demands. It balances between the Protestant community (of one million) and the Catholics to maintain the Six County status quo: and therefore pursues a basic policy of beating down the Catholic community.

The helplessness of the entire Catholic community to save its own reflected their basic situation: a section of the Catholic majority of the Irish people, but also a permanent minority locked inside the artificial Orange majority state of Northern Ireland, created by the British in 1920 against the wishes of the majority of the Irish people.

Within that state, the two communities are locked in a chronic antagonism. No democratic processes are available to the Catholics to achieve their liberation from it. It was carried out by British and Orange violence that overpowered them and kept them down for 50 years, so that there was a built-in Orange majority, backed up by a British government guarantee that the Orange community would have its way and no change could be allowed that it did not approve.

That is what the experience of the hunger strike spelled out again for the Six County Catholics.

Let us look briefly at how this situation came to exist.

In 1918 75% of Ireland's constituencies were won by candidates pledged to secede from Westminster and set up an Irish parliament in Dublin. When they did this, Britain retaliated with a campaign of shootings and burnings (of 'economic targets' and some towns) for 2½ years, before a Treaty gave the southern 26 counties independence.

In 1920 the Government of Ireland Act partitioned Ireland.

Various partition schemes had already been debated.

Ulster (9 counties) would have meant the Protestants were in a minority. The four county area in which there would be a massive Protestant majority and a 'manageable' Catholic minority was considered too small to be viable.

The six counties were settled on as the maximum area within which there was a 'safe' Protestant majority (two-thirds). It included Fermanagh and Tyrone, two whole counties with Catholic majorities.

Even with a four county/28 county partition there could have been no clean Catholic/Protestant break — the communities were too interlaced for that. The six county/26 county partition imprisoned a bigger Catholic minority in the Six Counties than the Protestants of all Ireland would have been in a 32 County state: such a 'settlement' was possibly only because the British state imposed it.

It was the opposite of a democratic solution to the Catholic/Protestant conflict — a solution with the maximum autonomy and safeguards for the minority compatible with the rights of the majority.

Two sectarian states emerged in Ireland, each repelling the majority in the other. They differed, however, fundamentally.

The Catholic minority in the Six Counties were largely working class and small farmers, people who were ground down and suppressed, deprived of civil rights kept down under a permanent Special Powers Act and under the guns and clubs of the Orange police, the B-Specials and the RUC.

The working class was permanently split.

In economically deprived Northern Ireland, Protestants had privileged access to jobs. Job selection (amid permanent high unemployment) was on the basis of religion, and the sectarian division in society gutted the unions – unity was possible only if the situation of the Catholics was not raised.

The civil rights movement in the late '60s – for equality in voting and an end to sectarian discrimination – brought the Catholics onto the streets, and, in backlash, the Protestants too.

It was a movement with an inescapable nationalist logic. The basic civil right they lacked was self-determination, the right not to be an artificial minority.

When sectarian fighting broke out, the British Army was sent in to 'keep the peace' – within the framework of the Six County state.

Within eleven months of going in to stop anti-Catholic pogroms, the British Army was imposing a curfew on the Falls Road and fighting gun battles with the Catholic militia.

The Catholics who had been roused for civil rights turned to an attempt to break out of the Six County state.

In a matter of months the IRA became a mass movement.

For the ten years since then, every attempt to find a solution *within the Six Counties* has failed completely. Britain has held the ring, normally by beating down the insurgent Catholics.

But there is no solution within the Six Counties. The Catholics have a right to fight for the only solution – a united Ireland with autonomy for the Protestant areas. They have every right to strike at the British army which oppresses them and whose fundamental role in Northern Ireland is to preserve the status quo.

Socialists must insist on raising these issues, however. An oppressed people fighting our own government has a right to the support of British socialists, even though we disagree with – or condemn – their tactics.

The British Left will have a right to denounce the nationalism of the oppressed Six County Catholics when we have wiped out the reflex nationalism in the British labour movement which helped Thatcher to be able to starve ten Republican prisoners to death.

E.C. 11.10.81

[The EC had scheduled a general discussion on Ireland to clarify disagreements arising from assessment of the hunger strikes. The Chelsea bombing took place the day before the EC.

The minutes are typed out here as written in the EC minutes book. I have just

inserted a few words of explanation (*italics, in square brackets*) where it would otherwise be obscure. The minutes give only brief notes of what comrades said: for example, it is plain from Carolan's response that Jones in his first contribution said more about the bombing than just that it was "not what we argue for". Nevertheless the general drift of the meeting should be clear.

For the record: Morrow, as far as I remember, did make some brief comment which is not included in the minutes, but he certainly did not dissent from the resolution.

Kinnell]

Present: Carolan, Cunliffe, Gardiner, Hill, Jones, Khan, Kinnell, Morrow, Parkinson, Smith.

Carolan: Ireland has been closely tied to Britain for centuries -- no independent history. Britain attempted to colonise [*i.e. settle colonists in*] Ireland -- result combination of US-type colony [*i.e. settler population, previous inhabitants marginalised*] in North East and settler-elite type colony in rest of Ireland.

'Bourgeois revolution' carried out from above by British governments [*i.e. land reform, in the late 19th/early 20th century*].

Divisions created by colonisation exploited by landlords campaigning against Home Rule.

Britain partitioned Ireland -- was not, could not, be a clean Green/Orange split. Connolly's predictions [*about Partition producing a 'carnival of reaction North and South'*] confirmed. Protestant/Orange bloc created.

Then Catholic revolt, in the North. But Southern Catholics largely passive. Northern revolt unable to win.

Our attitude? Side with the oppressed. But Republicans are peculiarly anachronistic -- created by failure of Marxists. Only solution -- link with class struggle in the South. But hunger strike has spread to South as purely nationalist struggle. Maximum outcome along that road is sectarian civil war and repartition.

Communalism is different from Irish nationalism which embraces the Protestants as Irish people. There are forces in the Catholic community, including on the left, who advocate sectarian assassinations.

Jones: The actions of the IRA are not what we argue for. E.g. recent London bombings. But from 1916 onwards the struggle against British imperialism has always posed civil war. But we still fight for a united Ireland.

Hunger strike movement cannot be described as dangerous. The polarisation is necessary. We still support actions against British imperialism, even on a nationalist basis. In many national struggles against imperialism there are risks of bloodbath.

Smith: Problem should start from national self-determination in Ireland. [*i.e. Carolan was at fault in not doing so*].

Carolan: I would be against a condemnation of the bombing.

Cunliffe: It sets back the gains of the hunger-strike struggle.

Kinnell: *[Not minuted, as I was taking the minutes. I argued that we could not simply condemn an IRA attack on a military target in Britain.]*

Khan: I agree with Carolan, but what about the occasion for his article? *[An article which had caused controversy because it argued that the hunger strikes, though deserving support, were generating a dangerous Catholic/Protestant polarisation.]*
 Peculiar. Hunger strike campaign not aggressively anti-Protestant.

Gardiner: Correct that bombing will set back campaign in British labour movement. But most military bombings hit civilians.

Unity of Catholic community *[i.e. in the hunger strike campaign]* is not automatically a positive move.

Carolan: If we're for self-determination, we're for the right to fight for it, including the right to hit military targets.

Irish struggle is not a normal anti-imperialist struggle. Britain would like to get out.

Civil war can only lead to repartition.

All the Irish Trotskyists have become nationalists. And the struggle has effaced class polarisation among the Catholics.

Jones: Defeat for British troops would be a defeat of imperialism world-wide.

We should condemn attacks on civilians whether in Ireland or in Britain. Also, tactically, attacks which are bound to hit civilians.

Carolan: Resolution on bombing: (a) Explain right to strike at military targets; (b) Criticise this particular action etc. *[i.e. on the basis that it was bound to hit civilians, as above]*; (c) Explain its root in *[Irish]* nationalism, and the root of that in British nationalism.

Hill: Also have to reiterate line on hunger-strike and political status.

Cunliffe: We should also assert the need for proletarian leadership in Ireland -- and discuss this further.

Jones: And we should present ourselves as identifying with the nationalist movement.

Resolution accepted.

There are also minutes of the NC discussions, one part of which were in IB 3. We will try to put these in an IB before the conference.

INTRODUCTION

Carolán

Comrade Jones - backed, it seems, if 'unofficially', by the Oxford faction - is pushing for a vote at the August conference on two issues concerning Ireland: on federalism and on our attitude to IRA bombing of civilian targets. This issue of the Internal Bulletin deals with IRA bombing and our attitude to it.

When we fused the two previous organisations into the new WSL, we listed the issues about which we thought there remained important differences to be discussed and sorted out in the course of knitting the two organisations together. Ireland was not one of them. I think we would all, on both sides, have been surprised to be told that Ireland would become a major disputed issue in the new organisation.

It seems nobody in the old WSL leadership bothered to acquaint themselves systematically with the politics of the I-CL before fusion. On the other hand, I did read - systematically and carefully and taking notes - through the file of old WSL publications. Of course, I was already familiar with the scandalous history on Ireland (and in Ireland) of the SLL/WRP, the organisation to which Smith and Jones belonged until the beginning of 1975, during the first six years of the revolt of the Northern Ireland Catholics.*

On the basis of what I read in the files of Socialist Press, I believed - as I still do - that we had substantial practical agreement on the key question: support for the Catholic revolt and for the Catholic armed forces against the British Army, focused in the demands for Irish self-determination and troops out.

After their break with the Healyites and their scandalous politics on Ireland, the founders of the WSL had evolved in an essentially healthy

* If the late '60s/early '70s SLL were to be judged on no other issue of political analysis or performance but Ireland, then that alone would be enough to show how ridiculous was its claim to be a serious organisation. The way they responded to the various bombings is dealt with in some of the articles reprinted.

Other points worth noting: The SLL opposed the deployment of British troops in August 1969 - but on the basis of systematically lying about what was going on in Ireland. According to the Newsletter and Workers Press, the British Army went in to subdue united working class struggle! The bitter facts of a split and fratricidally pogrom-minded working class were hidden from their readers. This did not stop them filling the air with shrill denunciation of those like IS/SWP who knew the reality and on that basis (wrongly, short-sightedly) refused to oppose the troops. As Workers Fight commented at the time, in the pamphlet, 'IS and Ireland', if only you could convince the SLL of the facts about Northern Ireland sectarianism, then they would logically have to adopt the position of IS. And anyone convinced by the Healyite press to oppose the troops certainly would logically have to go over to IS's position on learning the facts.

In N.Ireland itself, in August 1969, when the B-Specials and the RUC and other armed Orange pogromists were moving down from the heights of the walled Protestant city to the Catholic slums of the Bogside, the small group of SLLers in Derry refused to defend the barricades and announced that they were going off 'to build a revolutionary leadership in the trade unions'.

On October 7 1972 Workers Fight quoted and commented on the attitude of the SLL at that high-point of the Northern Ireland struggle:

"Ireland... was discussed recently by Workers Press on 4 October.

'... if the three years since trouble first began in 1969 hold any lessons at all, it is that terror carried out by groups of individuals achieves only the incitement of counter-terror'.

'The troops will not be withdrawn from Ulster, internment will not end, and decent living standards and jobs opportunities will not be provided for all workers until, as a first step, the Tory government is forced to resign

.../...

direction. There were zig-zags, of course, like the period of support for Militant's non-starter of a solution, trade union defence squads. But the general pro-Catholic and pro-Republican development was essentially healthy.

The politics of the old WSL on Ireland were, however, massively under-developed. On the myriad questions of Irish history, on analysis of the dozens of questions of strategy, tactics and perspectives which had been discussed in the British and Irish left from 1968 to 1972 or '74, the literature of the old WSL was a blank page.

Given political agreement on the key questions, I thought the organisation would easily grow together, sorting out differences as they arose, on the basis of reasonable discussion. That was before factionalism became a force in the life of the WSL.

In contrast to the old WSL, the I-CL and before it WF had a long involvement in Irish politics and in discussing the issues thrown up by the Catholic revolt after 1968, by the IRA military campaign, and by the bombings in Ireland and in England.

The little nucleus of four people who founded Workers Fight on leaving Militant in October 1966 spent the first 18 months of its existence as part of a loose, mainly emigre Irish organisation called the Irish Workers Group. In association with it and (formally) in its name, we brought out five issues of a theoretical journal, *An Solas/Workers Republic*. I had been a member since 1965 of the IWG, which included Eamonn McCann, Michael Farrell, Rayner Lysaght, and others whose names will be known to comrades.

Some of us had thus had the chance to read about, think about, and
 .../... continued from previous page
 and a Labour government is elected which is forced to carry out socialist policies.'

The same view was put forward on 2 October: '... the only answer is in the unity of Protestant and Catholic and British and Irish workers to force the Tory government to resign and return a Labour government pledged to socialist policies'.

What would be the culmination of a tremendous political development - the 'unity of Protestant and Catholic and British and Irish workers' - is seen as coming even before the far more modest 'first step'.

But in the meanwhile, before the unity of all British and Irish workers, what? Should the Republican workers defend themselves by the only means possible - that is, with guns - against the violence of the British Army and the Orange para-military forces?

If they take the advice of the Workers Press, no. They... should wait. Workers Press talks about 'the futile use of the gun' and describes the IRA as 'terrorists' - 'while army retaliation against terrorists is becoming massive and ruthless...' (2 October).

Thus the Workers Press fails to state support for the Republicans - fighting for the progressive goal of a united Ireland agd against imperialism - against the British Army and the Orangemen fighting to preserve the meagre relative privileges granted to them as the clients and supporters of British imperialism. It is just 'terror' and 'counter-terror'.

But by far the greater part of the military action of the IRA is not, in a Marxist sense, 'terrorism'. It is not the action of tiny groups isolated from the mass struggle. It is the action of a popular militia, working in small units. It is guerilla warfare.

One can only be grateful that the Workers Press line on Ireland is not followed in Vietnam. Otherwise the NLF would never have started fighting, and Diem would still rule his police state".

discuss, before Northern Ireland 'blew' at the turn of the decade, a whole range of basic questions - the IRA, the national question in Ireland, Partition, modern imperialism, etc.

For example, in 1966 I wrote the article on the IRA cited in this bulletin - 'Where the Hillside Men have sown' - to help Republican and ex-Republican militants to make or complete the transition from nationalism to Trotskyism. Though it was written without benefit of the two (each in its own way) fine studies of the IRA later published by Bowyer Bell and Coogan, the conclusions I reached about Republicanism in that and other articles of the same period have been the bedrock of my basic attitude on it ever since.

WORKERS' FIGHT ON IRELAND BEFORE 1968

Perhaps because of this background, Workers Fight had a distinctive response to the Irish crisis. What were our ideas?

We believed 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 relative 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 difference, 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."

(Editorial of Irish Militant, paper of the IWG, February 1967).

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 IWG).

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 Irish working class. We rejected economic nationalism as being no more than the discarded and discredited former economic policy of the 26 Co 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 international 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 kitsch 'Trotskyist' response to the stages theories and the opulists - 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 bourgeois 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..."

(Editorial, Irish Militant, February 1967).

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 IMG-style romanticism and flights of fantasy 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 Six Counties and because of the split working class there. Nevertheless it had to be supported.

When the Catholic civil rights agitation got under way 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 of national self-determination.

We said, in early '69 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 campaign was needlessly divisive. The demands one man (sic) one house, one man one job, one man one vote (there was plural voting for property-owners in local government elections in Northern Ireland), 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 Farre l, 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 revolu-

* 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 14 years' 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.

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 from their change of line from opposition to the British troops to effective support for them.

They 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.

tionary reunification of Ireland short of a socialist revolution to draw sectarian conclusions about the actual struggle that had erupted. But we did not forget the assessment. In fact the 12 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. Power-sharing in 1974 was an attempt (initially very successful) by the British government to shift its weight from the Protestants to the Catholics (and a section of the Protestants), while they bound the two parts of Ireland in a Council of Ireland, the first step to reunification. The Protestant general strike of May 1974 smashed that structure to bits.

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT DISPUTE

The disputes on Ireland in the new WSL erupt against this background of widely different degrees of involvement of the two previous organisations in Irish politics. They would be very strange disputes in any circumstances, but they are bizarre given (a) practical agreement on the key questions, and (b) the background of the two sides. It is plain from the debates - at the recent extended weekend school for example - that comrade Jones is discussing issues like federalism for the first time in his life.

The best you can say for Smith and Jones is that since they gained their political independence in 1975 they have moved towards support for the Republicans against the British government. In my book, that is to say a lot for them, and to say the essential thing in their favour on the Irish question.

Before that, as we have seen, for the decisive first six years after 1968, they took into Cowley the political rubbish of the WRP/SLL, which lied about Irish reality, which displayed its unique combination of bombast and cowardice when the bombs started going off in England, and which systematically lied about its socialist opponents on the question. The SLL/WRP had a pamphlet 'Who are the International Socialists', with two chapters on us, effectively accusing us of supporting the British troops. It contained a photo of a British soldier searching a man in Northern Ireland with a caption virtually blaming me by name for the incident!)

Yet look how Smith and Jones have conducted the discussion. By making pronouncements on issues like federalism in the style of a Pope rebuking an errant sinner. And by venomous denunciations of people like myself as 'reformists', 'capitulating to the pressure of imperialism', etc. etc.

'Self praise is no praise', as my mother used to say. Her disapproving ghost rises out of my subconscious to remind me of this when I read over the following paragraphs. Yet the sort of 'discussion' we have had on Ireland, intermittently for two years now, leaves me little choice but to insist that if people with the record on Ireland of Smith and Jones (and Johnson, who was the first to accuse us of 'bending under bourgeois pressure') are to continue 'discussing' by substituting of accusations that we are 'reformist', 'capitulators' etc. for rational and informed assessment of the issues, then the actual record of WF/I-CL should be taken into account.

ARE WE 'CAPITULATORS'?

The articles reproduced here show plainly, I think, that we have had a

basic consistency all the way through. If we are wrong now, it is not because of 'pressure' but because our basic ideas in the '60s were wrong. But I hope the arguments convince comrades that we have not only been consistent but right, and consistent with the Marxist approach to such questions.

The documents nonetheless fail to do justice to the record of the WF/I-CL tendency on Ireland. Our fundamental criticism of Republicanism has not prevented us from being active on the side of the Catholics in solidarity movements, etc. Look at the crude facts.

WF is the only British revolutionary organisation to have its national headquarters raided during the Irish war or - as far as I know - for many decades past. It happened in September 1973. I was alone in the headquarters when seven police turned up at 6am, two of them obviously armed.

We conducted a bitter nine-months campaign within the IS/SWP to change the policy to one of calling for troops out in 1969/70. A minority of a dozen or so at the September 1969 conference, and denounced as wanting a bloodbath, we were about even at the Easter conference in 1970. On my motion the National Committee changed IS's position a couple of months later.

After the attempted pogroms in August 1969, Catholic Derry and West Belfast 'seceded' behind barricades. These free areas were surrounded by a cordon of British troops.

Volunteers flocked to defend Free Derry and Free Belfast from the expected assault of the British Army, which manned the barricades from the outside carrying machine pistols, rifles, and clubs. WF sent two volunteers to Derry. Joe Wright and I lived in a camp in the Celtic Park sports ground for a couple of months, helping to police the area and prepared to defend it. I was elected representative of the 'outsiders' to the council that ran Free Derry. When the decision to take down the barricades and let the British Army in was taken, it was supported by the disoriented Republicans and by left leaders like Eamonn McCann. The vote on the committee was between them and a counter-motion by me against letting the troops in.

When the first bombs went off in England in February 1972, all the left groups except two lost their heads and made fools of themselves. Socialist Worker, for example, declared:

"For every army officer killed in Britain, the Tories have a thousand replacements".

The two exceptions were WF and the IMG. Except that WF was trying to produce a workers' paper and to talk to workers, and the IMG was then an organisation of self-consciously wild-eyed petty bourgeois ultra-lefts whose central orientation was student and Third-Worldist. It did not cost them very much to support the IRA. It did not, as with us, bring them into conflict with a central focus of their work, the industrial working class.

In 1975 WF, almost on its own, organised the first national demonstration against the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

CIVILIAN AND MILITARY TARGETS

As the texts show, we insisted on the distinction between civilian and military targets, not as a cop-out when civilians were the target, but when the target was an officers' mess at Aldershot barracks. We announced the limits of our support for IRA bombings at the point when we were almost alone in defending what they had just done.

The distinction arose then, and continues to be important for us now, as a result of our class politics and our class approach to the Irish question. It arose as a product of our determination to be rigorous and serious Marxists, and not because it made life easier for us. It was part, then, of an approach which, among working class and working-class-oriented organisations, completely

isolated us.

Yet the comrades have found it impossible to discuss these questions without charges of 'soft options', 'capitulating', etc.

I for one find this slightly hard to take from people who in 1972 were with Mr Healy and peddling his pseudo-Marxist cop-out denunciations of 'individual terrorism'.

In fact the documents reproduced here 'do contain one political error which is proof that we sometimes have bent under pressure - the press statement that Gardiner and I put out within an hour of the departure of the police from WF headquarters. It contains the sentence:

"In principle we support its [the IRA's] right to do what it thinks necessary".

That is wrong because it omits the distinction between civilian and military targets. Mistakes occur. In this case the 'pressure' of the armed police raid on G St, together - probably - with reluctance to appear to curry favour with the press, pushed us towards an error of 'intransigence'. (The fact that it was not entirely clear then whether the bombs going off in London at the time, or some of them, were not the work of provocateurs, may also have had an effect).

No, comrades, the record does not entitle you to evade the political questions with denunciations that we bend under pressure. Talk to us about the politics.

FACTIONALISM IN THIS DISPUTE

In fact, if you look at the records of the new WSL, it becomes plain and clear the present position of Jones and his co-thinkers on bombings is the product of pure factionalism.

When the NC discussed the issue and adopted a position in October and December 1981, Jones and Smith had the same position as Hill, Kinnell, Collins, Parkinson and myself now.

More than that. As the minutes of the EC that discussed the Chelsea bombing show (reprinted in this bulletin), the case for a balanced response to the explosion by the IRA of a massive nailbomb in a crowded Chelsea street was made by us, and Smith and Jones initially were for an unqualified condemnation.

Now I don't condemn Smith and Jones for reacting with revulsion and horror to the Chelsea bombing, or for reacting one-sidedly at first. The minutes indicate that Kinnell and myself were initially somewhat 'one-sided' in the opposite direction. And the more balanced approach in the final EC resolution that I drafted was agreed unanimously. (Morrow changed his mind shortly after, and lyingly claimed that non-condemnation had always been his position: see the NC minutes).

I do condemn Smith and Jones, and the organisation should condemn them, for what happened afterwards, and for what they are doing now on the question.

THE ARTICLE AND THE OUTCRY

I arranged an article according to the EC resolution and by EC decision. The article began by condemning the Chelsea nail bomb very sharply and clearly, and in no mealy-mouthed way, and then went on to make the case for our basic politics on Ireland. The article contains a defence of the right of the IRA to strike at military targets in Britain. Similar or sharper words of condemnation had been used before, describing bombings in Belfast in 1972, for example, as "a holocaust of ordinary people".

The condemnation expressed my real opinions and feelings on the matter,

and the opinions and feelings of the entire EC when we discussed it. The way it was written was calculated to gain a hearing from people whose overwhelming response would be the same as Smith's and Jones's.

Now I think the article, as an article, is all right - not brilliant or especially good, a bit flat, but just about all right. Then perhaps I would, wouldn't I? But even if it was a lousy article, bad and conception and execution, for sure it corresponds to the decision of the EC.

In no sense was it a purely personal article. Yet ever since I have been the target of an envenomed personal campaign through the organisation and in TILC about the article.

'ATROCITY'?

The loud emotional outcry from Oxford and Leicester that greeted the article would make sense only from people who wanted us to support the tactic of setting off a massive nail bomb in a street crowded with afternoon shoppers. Yet none of the critics held that position, or anything like it, so far as I can understand what they have been saying.

The uproar focused at first on alleged use of the word 'atrocities'. Now it was an atrocity, and it would in my opinion have been permissible to say so. But in fact that article didn't. (Such is the power of suggestion and loud assertion that I had to re-read the article to discover that it didn't!)*

The article used a rather hackneyed but still very useful phrase - 'the politics of the last atrocity' - which describes the violent swings of public opinion after each spectacular event in the war: sharply against the British after 13 unarmed civilians were shot in January 1972, then sharply against the Provisionals after the July 1972 carnage in Belfast ('Bloody Friday'), etc. The editors, putting the paper together, incorporated this phrase in an introductory sentence. A couple of lines got inadvertently left out of the text, garbling the passage containing the phrase. (It was obviously garbled: the original sense of the text is restored within square brackets in this IB).

The point was to argue against shallow weather-vane politics which forgets the basic issues in favour of immediate emotional reactions.

But a viciously personalised campaign followed about the article, which did not abate after the decisive NC vote on the basic line on bombings in December 1981. It was still going on at the 1982 summer school.

THE COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

The arguments the comrades used were and are truly remarkable.

I leave aside Morrow, who wobbled all over the place, and lied through his teeth about his initial position. As far as I remember he produced no distinctive argument.

Comrade Gable was a more loyal and serious critic, who refrained from wild denunciation and tried to express his own view precisely. This was that we were opposed to the entire strategy of the IRA, but could not criticise their 'tactics', like the Chelsea 'tactic'.

* It is in the same order of things as the slanderous nonsense that originated in the faction fight over the Falklands war and has now appeared in all the sectarian newspapers, Workers Power, Spartacist, etc: that we carried an interview with a certain MP during the Falklands war in which he called for economic instead of military sanctions by the British state against Argentina without dissent from us. He did call for economic sanctions in the interview. But the call for economic sanctions is criticised and attacked on the front page of the same paper!

"We are opposed to guerillaism as a strategy... But in defending the right of the oppressed to struggle we cannot select parts in this struggle to 'condemn' more than the other parts, and we are careful in our criticism always to distance ourselves from the bourgeois reaction. We recognise that the distinction between military and civilian targets is not a clear divide and we cannot therefore 'support' one and 'oppose' the other",

(Amendment at December 1981 NC).

Gable's arguments as recorded in the December 1981 NC minutes were:

"Division between military and civilian targets is false. To most British workers, the division makes no odds. For us, the division is difficult practically, and seems to be moralist. In every national liberation struggle there have been a lot of civilian casualties as a matter of strategy".

"My point is that our criticism of methods rests on general political criticisms. We can't [derive] our criticism from the number of people killed.

"How would you answer a question on the Birmingham pub bombings. I would answer that they were an inevitable tragedy arising from a conflict of imperialism and petty bourgeois nationalism - and petty bourgeois nationalism does not work.

"Yes, workers in Longbridge thought the article on the bombing was outrageously pro-IRA. But it was capitulationist - just inefficiently capitulationist".

Comrade Piggot, who has been one of the loudest and most condemnatory of the critics, said this among other things:

"When I discuss in the factory, I don't support bombing of civilians but focus on British imperialism".

We hope to put the full minutes in a future IB.

HOW TO EXPLAIN

Now in my opinion this brings us to the central question in this dispute, which is this: who are we, and what are we trying to do?

I think we are working class socialists, internationalists and democrats, who have our own independent programme for Ireland and everywhere else, and who support the IRA - when we support them - for our own reasons and from our own viewpoint. How is it that we can criticise their strategy and general politics, and yet not say sharply that we disapprove - as Piggot and Gable do, it seems - of civilian bombings?

The reason for saying that we disapprove is that we believe it. We therefore should not have any difficulty in understanding the feelings of not very political British workers about civilian bombings. By saying plainly that we condemn civilian bombings, at the same time as explaining why they happen and what our basic views are on Ireland, we lessen the barriers between the workers and us, we avoid needlessly creating barriers that will prevent us from being able to talk to our class, about Ireland and about other things.

Piggot, if I understand him, suggests that we should respond to the question, 'What about IRA civilian bombings?' with another question, 'What about the crimes of British imperialism?' As a one-line response to try to draw an angry worker into a balanced discussion, this may be useful. But it is not an answer to the original question. And if we are to be able to argue honestly, and to educate people, we have to answer questions squarely. Our job is to present a full, independent outlook of our own, not simply to respond to workers voicing revulsion against British imperialism's opponents by voicing our own revulsion against British imperialism.

We should not be frightened of saying what we think when it goes 'against the stream'; we should also not allow fears of 'capitulation' to stop us saying what we think when it is 'with the stream'. Otherwise we end up proposing not an independent alternative to bourgeois public opinion, but merely a primitive mirror-image of it. Just such a mistake has led too many militants into refusing to condemn crimes of Stalinism - because they feared by doing so to capitulate to bourgeois pressure.

Gable's reasons as to why we should not say what we think about civilian bombings seem to concern pride, or the notion that to do so somehow is not honourable. It is 'capitulatory'.

'Capitulation' is a big word which should not be in this discussion. If any of us have 'capitulated', then we have gone over to the British ruling class viewpoint and policies for Northern Ireland, and support them against the IRA, as a result of our opposition to civilian bombings. That is the literal meaning of the word here.

Who has done this? By what standards of measurement is condemnation of the civilian bombing tactic capitulation in the political sense?

And why does Gable think it impermissible to condemn particular acts of the IRA, but permissible to distance ourselves completely and fully by defining the issue as a matter of petty bourgeois nationalists from whom nothing better is to be expected anyway, and who are therefore, it seems, declared not to be on the same political and moral plane as us?

Gable cannot mean capitulation politically. He must refer to, and be primarily concerned with, moral and psychological capitulation.

Capitulation to what? To the backwardness of the British workers? But working class opposition to civilian slaughter is not backwardness - even if the workers have double standards. The notion that we cannot tell average workers that we share their revulsion about civilian bombings (although in fact we do), because they do not already share our general assessment on Ireland, is a variant of sectarian ultimatism. Instead of playing our proper role of educating and enlightening workers, using whatever approach will help to do that, we are to stand proudly aloof, and won't talk to them until they share our basic viewpoint.

Like all such 'sectarianism', this reduces us to a passive role. Don't utter a word of agreement to the workers' human revulsion at slaughter unless they first support the basic goals of the IRA! Gable does make one concession, but a quintessentially sectarian one: that we can obliquely criticise the IRA, so long as we express it in our own jargon, using terms (petty bourgeois, imperialist) that convey little to the average worker.

DEFENDING WHAT IS DEFENSIBLE

This approach means retreating up a ladder of abstraction, and thereby would render us incapable of defending what is defensible in the IRA campaign.

It is possible, from our politics, to defend attacks on military targets in Britain (even if in our opinion the entire military campaign is counter-productive: that has been my opinion for a long time). For example, I wrote an article explaining/defending an explosion in an army coach aboutside Manchester in which a woman and two children died together with (I think) seven soldiers. I was, of course, sickened by it, but I wrote an article aimed at the average militant British worker defending it according to our politics and the right of the IRA to strike at the British army. I found it possible to explain it in terms of a basic democratic right of the oppressed to strike at their oppressors' army. But to present such explanations with conviction and political and intellectual consistency, you are obliged to make the distinction between military and civilian targets. The justifications and criteria that allow us to defend military attacks do not apply to civilian targets. For the only posi-

tion from which one can defend indiscriminate slaughter of 'enemy' civilians is chauvinism, national hate, national revenge. The British worker who has that outlook will not favour the IRA.

The alternative to explaining the criteria and the distinctions would be to treat the readers with utter contempt, and rely on a vague and evasive non-committal attitude. You would avoid having to condemn civilian bombings - at the cost of being unable to explain the military attacks.

I suspect there is a half-developed notion also present that we shouldn't criticise the IRA publicly within imperialist Britain. This is understandable, emotionally and psychologically. In practice, though, it is just another variant of refusing to talk to British workers as they are. It has 'Third-Worldist' overtones of the sort usually found among Maoists who identify the British workers with the bourgeoisie. The documents of the former Smith-Jones tendency, especially IB 7, were awash with this sort of idea.

A 'PURE' POSITION

Comrade Piggot's argument, I think, is even more plainly sectarian than Gable's. Piggot has been extremely loud in denunciations of me about Ireland, and on this issue especially. His starting point seems to be some sort of Irish nationalism.

I was astonished to hear him say he would not defend the Chelsea nail-bombing, at the same time as he condemned the article. He wants, apparently, to confine comment to generalities about imperialism. I find it difficult to imagine a conversation with a worker (unless s/he is already more or less with us) being steered onto a high-minded discussion about imperialism without dealing with the immediate, emotion-charged question of the bombings. Comrade Piggot would have to admit - horrible capitulation! - that slaughtering civilians was not a good idea in order even to be able to discuss the whys and wherefores and the ultimate responsibility of imperialism for the situation.

Workers Fight's condemnation of the Birmingham bombings in 1974 aroused some controversy within and around the organisation. One close contact, in particular, moved away from us on the issue. Later he joined the Provisionals.

He bitterly condemned our denunciation of the bombing. But we got an instructive response when we asked him to move a WF model resolution on the bombings in his union branch (where he was well-established and active). He refused, not because the resolution condemned the bombings - but because it expressed solidarity with the IRA's basic struggle against British imperialism. He never raised such ideas in his union branch, he explained - it would alienate people too much.

His 'intransigent' stand was thus purely for private consumption - not for work in the labour movement.

I don't suppose comrades Gable or Piggot have a similar attitude. But could they imagine putting a resolution in their union branch after a civilian bombing without condemning that bombing? For that purpose, could they be satisfied with the approach of refusing to comment on the specific bombing, and instead talking about the crimes of imperialism and the general inadequacies of petty bourgeois nationalism?

And what does it mean to demand from the paper a 'harder' line than you take yourself? It must mean seeing the paper as something 'pure' and 'clean', rather than a tool for use, geared actually to reach people.

Here the whole issue seems to link up with the general problem of comrades having a tendency to make a fetish of the paper, its labels and ideological tags, instead of seeing it as a tool to be changed and adapted tactically in order to do a job in given conditions and circumstances.

JONES'S AMENDMENT

The NC decided on a WSL position 18 months ago. Voting was 21 to 10 with 2 abstentions. Those voting for the majority position included Smith, Jones, Hunt, etc.

Comrade Jones has reopened the issue. He has an amendment to point 3 of the NC resolution, where it condemns civilian bombings in Britain and in Ireland. The amendment reads in full:

"This criticism is secondary, and presented in such a manner".

That's how it is written, and that's all there is of it.

Formally one could yawn and vote for this amendment. The criticism is politically secondary - it does not override our basic position. Criticism was secondary in the Chelsea nail-bomb article.

If the amendment is meant as an attempt to impose a formula for future articles (they must begin, 'We support the IRA...', and then criticise), then it is half-baked because it does not actually say that. Even if it did say that, and it got passed by conference, no responsible day-to-day leadership after the conference, NC, EC, or the comrades responsible for the paper, could possibly let the precise details of the way the paper and the organisation responded to, for example, another slaughter on the scale of the Birmingham bombings, be determined by such formulas.

Essentially the amendment is politically meaningless. Nevertheless it should not be passed. Jones has reopened the issue - I assume deliberately, and for factional reasons: the triviality of his amendment is proof of that, if you have eyes to see. The amendment will allow comrades in the minority in December 1981 to re-raise the whole basic issue. If Jones's meaningless amendment is passed, they will claim for it all sorts of significance it does not literally have.

ERRORS OF WORKERS FIGHT

The reprints in this bulletin demonstrate, I think, the consistency of the approach that some of us have had, not only since the beginning of the Catholic revolt and the IRA campaign, but for quite a while before that. Whatever inconsistencies may be found in this or that detail - the way the issue of bombings was presented in the statement after the police raid, for example - there has been a fundamental consistency.

That does not mean, however, that WF's politics were completely adequate. I can dig into articles and editorials, and publish the material in this bulletin, critical of the IRA at key moments like 'Bloody Friday' and the Birmingham bombings. On the whole, however, we tended to suppress criticism as much as we decently could - and that was too much.

It is probable that many comrades educated by WF/I-CL did not pay much attention to the qualifications and criticisms, which were always to be found in subordinate paragraphs. The criticisms of the IRA on Bloody Friday, for example, were published in an editorial which carried the headlines 'British Troops Out' (on the front page) and 'For the IRA, Against British imperialism' (over the continuation on page 3).

Thus we were (it seems to me) also partly guilty of the sort of sectarianism I accuse Piggot and Gable of. We found it extremely difficult to sell that issue of the paper during the 'July days' of 1972 when, just up the road from our headquarters, tens of thousands of demonstrators marched and congregated outside Pentonville Prison where five dockers were imprisoned under Edward Heath's Industrial Relations Act.

The basic principles, views and assessments in the coverage were correct, I think. But the way they were expressed tended to cut us off from dialogue

with workers who were not already close to our ideas on Ireland.

Also, it is not intended by the republication of these articles and excerpts to suggest that the Northern Ireland situation can be viewed in the same light today as a decade ago.

12 years into the IRA war, it is plain that the whole struggle is in an impasse. The IRA in the 6 Counties has, by dropping federalism, become overtly sectarian. The 26 Counties workers remain fundamentally indifferent, despite sporadic solidarity action as during the hunger strikes. Apart from successes within the Northern Ireland Catholic community against the SDLP - beginning with the hunger strikes - the IRA has not made any advance in 11 years. The turn into impasse could be traced back, perhaps, to 'Bloody Friday'.

Marxists have the duty, even though we are British (or, like myself, Irish but live in Britain) to assess the overall situation. Although I believe WF's principles and ways of assessing the situation were correct, its coverage was deficient because we tended to silence ourselves and our assessments and criticisms of the IRA - to impose a self-denying ordinance on our own politics in deference to a petty bourgeois nationalist formation because it was 'leading the struggle against imperialism', even when we knew that its anti-imperialism was necessarily very limited. I think we should not have been so self-effacing.

TO SUM UP

To restate the issue in a nutshell: the only position from which to support or fail to object to actions like the Birmingham pub bombings is Irish chauvinism. The only basis on which to talk to British workers honestly and convincingly in support of the basic objectives of the IRA is working class internationalism and consistent democracy in the relations between nations, people, and fragments of peoples and nations.

Thus comrades who follow the IRA into support for acts of bloody and desperate chauvinism pitch themselves into a quandary. It does not matter that the comrades only want to 'not condemn'. In the labour movement and in reality, not to condemn is to condone, or to apply double standards, or to say implicitly: the British people and the British working class bring it on themselves.

Petty bourgeois moralists and conscience-stricken liberals are unable to talk to the working class because they have no ideological independence. We must have ideological independence.

Carolán

with workers who were not likely close to our ideas on Ireland.

Also, it is not intended by the representatives of those who are anxious to put out the Northern Ireland situation that it is a simple case of the same light, only in a broader area.

It seems that the I.R.A. is in a position that is quite different from that of the I.R.A. in the 1920s. The I.R.A. in the 1920s was, by the very nature of its existence, a revolutionary force. It was a force that was not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods. It was a force that was not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods. It was a force that was not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods.

There is a very real danger that the I.R.A. is now a force that is not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods. It is a force that is not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods. It is a force that is not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods. It is a force that is not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods.

THE I.R.A.

To state the issue in a nutshell: the only reason from which to support the I.R.A. is to support the I.R.A. as a force that is not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods. It is a force that is not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods. It is a force that is not only revolutionary in its aims but also in its methods.

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