

Why we should support federalism within a united Ireland

In discussing whether we should support federalism within a united Ireland, our concern should not be with constitutional law, or a search for a constitutional formula clever enough to guarantee the results we want.

The issue is: do we allow legitimate concern for taking sides with the revolt of the Northern Catholic minority against British imperialism to wipe out and substitute for our independent programme, and in particular the democratic demands which must be an essential part of it? Do we keep in mind that Marxism

"values most the alliance of the proletarians of all nations, and evaluates every national demand... from the angle of the class struggle of the workers" (Lenin)

- and thus see Catholic/Protestant worker unity as central? Or do we allow ourselves to slide over into Catholic nationalism with the excuse that 'anti-imperialism' demands a stern stand against the Protestants?

There is no guarantee that federalism within a united Ireland would 'work', i.e. would reconcile Protestants and Catholics. Quite likely it wouldn't. Quite likely no end to Ireland's torture is possible short of unity through a revolutionary movement which unites the working class on a socialist basis, pushes the Catholic-Protestant conflict backstage, and thus solves the national question in passing. We must do everything we can to help bring about that socialist movement. But part of the necessary education and mobilisation for socialism is the fight for a consistently democratic attitude on political issues.

As well as promoting the general ideas of socialism and class struggle we must respond concretely on Partition and the right to self-determination of the Irish people. Likewise, and for the same reason, we must respond on the issue of the relations of the two communities within Ireland.

Clearly we support individual democratic rights: freedom of religion, separation of Church and State, the right to abortion and contraception, divorce rights. There is no argument about that among us. But consistent democracy also includes the right to autonomy for sharply distinct areas within a state, like the overwhelmingly-Protestant areas in Ireland.

"As far as autonomy is concerned, Marxists defend not the right to autonomy but autonomy itself, as a general, universal principle of a democratic state with a mixed national

composition, with sharp differences in the geographical and other conditions..." (Lenin).

"In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife, it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government which guarantees full equality of all nations and languages, which provides the people with schools where instruction is given in all the native languages, and the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc." (Lenin).*

Federalism, or provincial autonomy, does not mean a separate Orange state. It means that under a federal (all-Ireland) GOVERNMENT, which would deal with all-Ireland matters and establish uniform civil rights, legal procedures, education provisions, etc., considerable powers would be delegated to elected provincial assemblies.

To worry about the details is pure pedantry.**

** Because the federalist proposal is not (or at least not primarily) advice to a constitution-drafting commission, but a policy to arm Irish socialists and republicans, it would be pure pedantry to argue at any length about the mechanics of federalism.

Obviously there are many different possible units - the four heavily-Protestant counties of Antrim, Armagh, Derry and Down, the nine counties of Ulster as previously favoured by the Provisionals, or others. Should the federal system embrace only two units, or more (as with the Provisionals' old four-province idea)? Exactly which powers should be held at the federal (all-Ireland) level,

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* In Lenin's writings harsh polemics can be found against the slogan of 'cultural-national autonomy'. This may be confusing.

'Cultural-national autonomy' was proposed as an alternative to 'the right of nations to self-determination' by the Austrian Socialist Party leaders before World War 1. Under it the members of the different nationalities within the Austro-Hungarian state would be organised, irrespective of where they lived, under national councils for the conduct of their educational and cultural affairs. It was a sort of Nationalist equivalent of 'confessionalism'.

In Lenin's view this formula was a sop to nationalist ideology, rather than the independent working-class alternative to all privileges, all nationalist ideologies, offered by his position:

"A struggle against the privileges and violence of the oppressing nation and no toleration of the strivings for privilege on the part of the oppressed nation".

The statement quoted above, advocating provincial autonomy, is Clause 1 of a 1913 Bolshevik Party resolution. It is followed by a Clause 2 denouncing 'cultural-national autonomy'.

Federalism is a common feature in bourgeois-democratic constitutions (Switzerland, the US, Canada, Australia, West Germany...). It is a feature of liberal-Stalinist Yugoslavia. It was found in a workers' democratic constitution (the early USSR). The details of course vary. The principle is the important thing: maximum decentralisation to provincial (and/or more local) level compatible with national unity, with the aim of calming the fears of local minorities about stifling domination by the national majority.

The 'right to self-determination' of the Protestant community would not make sense. There is no territory naturally suited to the exercise of such 'self-determination'. Any 'Protestant state' would entrap and oppress a large Catholic minority, as the Six Counties has done for 60 years. Concretely, now, 'Protestant self-determination' would mean restoration of Stormont (the Northern Ireland parliament abolished in 1972) and/or repartition. It would not be a democratic solution, clearing the path for class struggle, but a sectarian solution, bitterly divisive for the working class.

But these considerations cannot obscure the fact that the Protestants are a distinct community, a substantial section of the Irish nation. To make a united Ireland viable, they have to be conciliated at least to some extent. Moreover, why are Marxists interested in a united Ireland? Not for any mysticism about the 'sacred isle', but for the possibilities it gives of better conciliating and uniting workers Catholic and Protestant, Northern and Southern, and Irish and British.

The Protestant workers oppose a united Ireland in the name of a reactionary defence of privileges? Yes, and we cannot in any way conciliate or compromise with that defence of privileges. But why are the Protestant workers rallied behind a reactionary defence of privileges? Because of their fears which we should be able to conciliate.

They fear for their material position; they fear to lose the welfare benefits they get from the British state, and to be reduced to the miserable condition of the Catholics. To that fear we must answer with socialist demands.

They also fear 'Rome rule'. Many on the left would reply to this fear with assurances that the Provisionals are secular and in bitter conflict with the Church, and that the 26 Counties are non-sectarian anyway. This amounts to whitewashing petty bourgeois nationalism and, more scandalously, the 26 County bourgeoisie.

Divorce was prohibited in the 26 Counties in 1925 and the prohibition was written into the constitution in 1937. Contraception is legal only for married couples and before 1973 was totally illegal. Abortion is illegal and there is currently a campaign to write that into the constitution. The Provisionals oppose writing it into the constitution, but want abortion to remain

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which at province level, which at county level, which at town or district level?

To focus on such details would be as pointless as Marx and Engels accompanying their call in the Communist Manifesto for "a heavy progressive income tax" with an appendix giving detailed proposals for tax schedules, model tax return forms, etc...

banned. The Catholic Church has a strong domination in the education system, and used effectively to control the censorship.

Not sectarian?

To point out that the small and mostly well-off Protestant minority in the South has suffered much less than the Catholics in the North is true, but not much of an answer to anyone who objects to the Catholic coloration of the 26 County state.

The Provisionals are secular and in bitter conflict with the Church? Apart from their Catholic-influenced position on issues like abortion rights, yes. But the Republican movement has always been secular and in bitter conflict with the Church. Yet out of the Republican movement have come both the two Green Tory parties - Fine Gael and Fianna Fail - which dominate the 26 County state.

Fine Gael was formed by the Republicans who supported the Treaty in 1921-2. Within a year of fighting a war of independence against Britain, they were fighting a civil war to suppress anti-Treaty Republicans.

As for Fianna Fail, its evolution from armed struggle against the 26 County state to bourgeois-clericalist administration of it was finished in less time than the current 'troubles' in the North have so far lasted.

Eamonn de Valera - founder of Fianna Fail, and prime minister in the '30s, '40s, and '50s, president in the '60s and '70s - took part in the Easter Rising of 1916. So did Sean Lemass, who as Fianna Fail prime minister from 1959 to 1966 started to make the 26 Counties the most welcoming area for the multinationals in all Europe.

Between June 1922 and May 1923, De Valera's Republicans fought a civil war against the 26 County state. In April 1926 they separated off from the rest of Sinn Fein to form a new party, Fianna Fail. In August 1927 they discovered a way of settling their consciences about the oath of allegiance to the British Crown (then still part of the 26 County constitution) and entered the Dail (the 26 County parliament). By March 1932 Fianna Fail was in power - and embarked on a policy of disastrous economic nationalism, rewriting the constitution to make the Catholic bias of the state explicit, in 1937, and repressing Republicans.

Aren't Gerry Adams and other Provisional Sinn Fein leaders sincere about wanting a secular, socialist Republicanism? Yes, they are. But the people who fought in the Easter Rising were not careerists. Good intentions count for less than the logic of class politics. The Provisionals have no effective strategy for working class power in Ireland. And if the working class does not rule, then the bourgeoisie will rule - selecting and moulding middle class politicians to its needs.

There is no good reason to be complacent about the risk of Catholic sectarianism in a united Ireland. What would happen when the intense hopes and ambitions concentrated on the objective of a united, independent Ireland were disappointed? Disappointed they would be - for the Irish Republic would be no more guarantee of prosperity, happiness, or relief from the economic domination of the banks and multinationals than any other capitalist nation-state. Unless socialists could shape events decisively, the disappointed nationalism would inevitably turn rancid, bitter - and start looking for scapegoats and 'enemies within'. It might even do that under cover of 'socialist' rhetoric.

To use this future danger to avoid aiding with the revolt of the Northern Catholic minority now would be shameful. It is a just, democratic, anti-sectarian revolt. But to be driven by concern to support the Catholics into denying the danger of Catholic sectarianism is mindless.

Whoever else may try to reconcile the Protestant workers with Catholic nationalism - or, rather, to rely on vain hopes of such a reconciliation - the task of socialists does not lie in that direction. We have no brief to defend the Catholic bourgeoisie against Protestant workers' suspicions. Our task is to formulate a programme of socialist and democratic demands which can arm Irish socialists and Republicans to give Irish workers, Catholic and Protestant, a perspective of neither community oppressing or dominating or pushing around the other.

Autonomy for the mainly-Protestant areas within a united Ireland should be part of that programme. So should be wide-ranging local democracy, giving extensive rights to mainly-Catholic towns or districts within mainly-Protestant areas, and mainly-Protestant districts in mainly-Catholic areas.

We cannot, of course, guarantee that the workers will rally to the programme. All we can do is formulate a programme which honestly tackles reality and conforms to the logic of the class struggle. If that programme fails to win support, then we will not be able to influence events. We cannot be inspectors-general of history or constitutional advisers to the powers-that-be. We have no way of finding a guarantee against reactionary outcomes in Ireland - an indefinite continuation of the present stalemate, or a collapse into civil war and repartition. What we should be able to do is ensure that if these reactionary outcomes prevail, it is not because the Marxists have failed to propose a sufficiently full socialist and democratic programme.

A lot of the objections to federalism, I think, are based on the false idea that it is supposed to be a cure-all; and/or, on a misguided search for a 'guarantee' (outside of an active, united workers' movement) that Protestant sectarianism will never ride again.

THE EXAMPLE OF QUEBEC

The example of Quebec, I think, throws a sidelight on some of these issues.

Quebec stands out with Ireland (and perhaps some of the nationalities in the Spanish state, about which I know little) as being an oppressed nation which nonetheless is highly developed in a bourgeois sense. By general social structure and living standards it belongs with the nations of North America and Western Europe rather than with the Third World.

French colonialists settled Quebec in the 16th century, massacring and pushing out the native population. In 1760 England conquered the area. At first, briefly, England set itself the aim of thoroughly Anglicising Quebec. (In Acadia - New Brunswick - the French were simply deported, 10,000 of them). Very soon, however, England settled down to a policy of collaboration with the French-Canadian upper class.

Quebec has enjoyed substantial provincial autonomy, under

French-Canadian provincial governments, ever since the Canadian Confederation was founded in 1867. Yet it has been an oppressed nation - incorporated into an alien political unit. Historically, the main expression of the oppression has been the language question. English was the language the boss and the official made the French-Canadian speak if s/he wanted to get anywhere. English was the language that visibly and audibly dominated the centre of Quebec's big city, Montreal, and the roads to privilege and power. Many English-Canadians displayed crude, blatant 'racism' towards the French-Canadians.

There was a national revolt in 1837-8, and anti-conscription riots during World War 1. (In World War 2 the federal government was more careful, but when compulsory service overseas was introduced in 1944 half the French Canadians scheduled to go overseas went AWOL).

Between 1936 and 1960 Quebec's provincial government was run by the right-wing, sourly inward-looking and nationalist Union Nationale of Maurice Duplessis. In 1960 the Union Nationale regime collapsed in a welter of scandal; the provincial Liberal Party came to power and carried out the so-called 'quiet revolution', a capitalist modernisation which boosted the status of the French language, extended trade union rights, and expanded the economic role of the provincial government, especially through Quebec-Hydro, its hydro-electric company.

In the late 1960s the expectations aroused by these reforms fused explosively with other factors to generate a huge revival of Quebec nationalism. The colonial liberation struggles, the black power movement in the US, the student radicalisation, and - oddly - Gaullism, all influenced this. Sullen resentment turned into political activism. Quebecois began to speak of themselves as 'the white niggers of North America'.

In 1968 a new separatist party, the Parti Quebecois, was formed. It won landslide victories in the 1976 and 1981 provincial elections. In contrast to the heavily right-wing 'Church, Family, Nation' politics of earlier separatist groups, the PQ has projected a social-democratic image. It has applied to join the Socialist International. It relies heavily on the trade union movement for support.

The status of the French language has improved. But not only has the PQ turned viciously against the working class with cuts and anti-union laws (earlier this year); in some respects, it seems to me, the English-speaking minority (some 15 to 20%) is now oppressed within Quebec.

Canada, at federal level, used to be unilingual, Quebec bilingual. Now Canada is officially bilingual, Quebec unilingual. According to Bill 101, made law in August 1977, French is the only language of administration in the province (for official forms, government offices, social security, etc.) Every child must attend a French language school unless a parent was educated in English in Quebec.

The English-speaking minority affected by this includes a good chunk of very well-off people, but also, for example, Italian and East European immigrants (who generally have learned English but not French), and all social classes in some towns to the east of the St Lawrence river which are overwhelmingly

English-speaking. (Quebec also has a sizeable population of Irish extraction - which is mostly, however, French-speaking).

The French-speaking backlash is highly understandable, and not simply to be equated with the arrogant English-language domination of the past. Yet it shows very well how the nationalism of an oppressed nation can turn rancid and oppressive when it runs up against disappointment. (And how that can happen even under cover of an apparent move to the left: the PQ is more 'left' than previous Quebec separatists).

Central to this outcome is the weakness of the Canadian labour movement. Quebec has its own trade union movement, separate from the Canadian movement. Canada's feeble Labour Party, the NDP, has no base in Quebec. (Generally, party politics in Quebec are completely different from the rest of Canada). The Quebec unions, more militant than the English-Canadian unions, have found no path yet except to tie themselves to the chariot of the bourgeois-nationalist PQ.

What attitude should socialists have advocated, and advocate, for the labour movement to take? Support for self-determination for Quebec. Support for independence for Quebec - to clear the national question out of the way would assist class politics. (The PQ called a referendum in Quebec in May 1980 on separation. The result was 40% for separation, 60% against. The federal government applied heavy pressure against separation.)

At the same time - consistent democracy: equality of languages, maximum possible local autonomy. And an explanation that the way the Quebec workers can fight the domineering US multinationals is not by turning in frustration against hapless Italian immigrants, or even the middle-class Anglo-Saxons, but by a socialist programme, which demands unity with the English-Canadian and US workers.

Federalism has not 'worked' in Quebec. Independence on a bourgeois basis would not 'work' very well either.

But would we conclude that socialists should oppose self-determination for Quebec, or extensive provincial autonomy as long as it remains within the Canadian state? No: we would conclude that formal democratic rights have limited effect within capitalism, and especially so if there is not a strong socialist labour movement to defend them and fight for their use.

Would our answer to mistreatment of English speakers in Quebec be to oppose self-determination or to oppose provincial rights? No: it would be general democratic rights, local autonomy, etc.

Could we give a guarantee that formal equality of languages* in Quebec would not mean de facto English-language domination? No, we couldn't. We would explain that the root of the problem is the economic domination of the US and English-Canadian corporations, that workers' unity is necessary to fight that, and that a consistently democratic policy on languages is necessary for workers' unity - only thus is a Quebec really controlled by the working people of Quebec possible.

* I don't think this need exclude some 'positive discrimination' measures.

In fact many socialists have supported French unilingualism in Quebec. I once wrote an article hesitantly implying support myself (Workers' Action no.37) - i.e. I did not feel confident to criticise the prevailing left attitude. But that attitude amounts to 'choosing camps' at the expense of a principled programme. It is wrong for Quebec; and a similar method is wrong for Ireland too.

WOULD FEDERALISM ALLOW A PROTESTANT ASCENDANCY TO SURVIVE?

Some comrades object that federalism would mean a Protestant-sectarian statelet in the North-East. Partly this is just misunderstanding: there is a radical difference between a separate, Partitionist, Northern Ireland state, whether independent or ruled by Westminster, and a North-East provincial unit with some local autonomy within a united Ireland.

The provincial government would be tied by all-Ireland laws; and the federal (all-Ireland) institutions would have power to intervene against abuses and oppression of Catholics in the province. The rights of the province's Protestant majority could not override the rights of the majority of the Irish people.

However - to repeat the point - while socialists do not dismiss bourgeois-democratic constitutional guarantees, and often fight for them, we do not place faith in them. A north-east province in a united Ireland might feature Protestant-sectarian practices, with the federal government taking no action against them for one reason or another (for example: because it wanted to 'divide and rule' the working class). Equally, it might feature oppression of the Protestants, with the provincial government doing little about it (as the nationalist Quebec provincial government long did nothing about the oppression of the French Canadians).

For that matter, local Protestant-sectarian discrimination might exist in some areas in a united Ireland without any federal arrangement at all. After all, if Belfast is to have a democratically-elected city authority, it can hardly fail to be Protestant-dominated.

Would the comrades who oppose federalism as allowing the survival of Protestant-sectarian discrimination also oppose an elected city authority for Belfast? Would they suggest direct rule over Belfast from Dublin? If Catholic domination is the guarantee they want against continued Protestant-sectarian discrimination - and logically that is the direction in which the opposition to federalism points - then the cure is hardly better than the disease.

A democratic united Ireland can only be created by the action of real social forces, not by ingenious constitutional guarantees. What socialists can do is to fight for the class-conscious workers to enter the clash of social forces armed with a full programme - including a full manifesto of democratic rights. Democratic demands like provincial autonomy are important not because we think that writing them into a constitution at a ceremony in Dublin will guarantee anything, but because they can arm and educate class-conscious workers to be a real force for democracy, for the ending of all sectarian discrimination and bigotry, and thus for class unity.

WHY IS FEDERALISM IMPORTANT NOW?

In 1971-2 politics in Northern Ireland changed dramatically.

Stormont (the Northern Ireland parliament) was abolished. Direct rule from Westminster was introduced. The Unionist Party, which had dominated Six Counties politics for 50 years, disintegrated. The Protestant working class broke from the Protestant bourgeoisie - towards the politics of populist bigotry. The IRA - which in the late '60s had been a skeleton - became a mass force in the Catholic community.*

Since 1972, despite many important twists and turns, the basic facts of the situation have remained unchanged, in stalemate. The British Army cannot defeat the Catholics, the Catholics cannot defeat the combined forces of the British Army and the Protestants.

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

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

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

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

Lenin argued:

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

* Workers Fight and the I-CL advocated federalism for many years, and even before the dramatic events of 1971-2. You will find it advocated in the 1969 Workers' Fight resolution against the IS/SWP dropping of 'Troops Out', in our 1972 arguments for outspoken solidarity with the IRA, in our 1974 condemnation of the Birmingham bombings, in our mid-'70s polemics in the Troops Out Movement. Yet in all the heated debates around these issues, federalism was one thing our opponents never argued against or denounced.

tion will not 'sharpen', but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation".

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

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

Now some comrades in the WSL seem to argue that 'Troops out' and 'the defeat of British imperialism' are the crux of the Irish question, and all else is pettifogging and probably 'capitulation to imperialism'. But the negative slogan, in itself, is still a 'hollow phrase'.

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

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

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

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

There would be a bloodbath.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is possible to evade these issues by wishful thinking. It is possible to assume that at the crucial point the national struggle would magically 'grow over' into socialism, and in some 'dialectical' leap the Protestants would be converted to republicanism. It is possible to remain blinker^{ed} in a sort of inverted British nationalism, saying that 'the defeat of British imperialism' and its effect on the 'balance of world forces' are the things that really matter, and that a positive solution within Ireland is a secondary issue. It is possible to resort to a crude theory of the Protestants as pure pawns of Britain, so that their reactionary ideas would drain away like water out of a bath once the 'plug' of British troops was pulled out.

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

The federal proposal might not avert sectarian civil war, either. Whether anything short of a mass socialist movement uniting the workers of both communities (or a big section of them) can end the present impasse is a progressive sense is doubtful. Our programme is to develop that socialist movement: seriously, not by empty schematising about the present nationalist struggle becoming socialist if only it is intensified sufficiently. We should not blunt our socialist programme by false 'realism', by getting tied up in working out 'answers' for the present forces in the situation over which we have no control anyway. But federalism does not imply blunting our socialist programme in any way. It does not limit us, or prevent us from pushing as hard as we can for a socialist Ireland. On the contrary: to work effectively for a socialist revolution in Ireland, we need to have our socialist programme include democratic demands, and a possibility of relating to the political situation now, of division and anguish, more concretely than just

* This does not mean making 'troops out' conditional!

by saying that a united class movement would be better.

A socialist programme needs to include federalism, as a subordinate but important demand.

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

Kinnell. 11.8.83.

The quotations from Lenin are:

Page 1: "As far as autonomy is concerned..." - 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination'.

Page 2: "In so far as national peace..." - 1913 resolution of the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party on the national question.

Page 2: "A struggle against the privileges..." - 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination'.

Page 9: "There is not, nor can there be..." - 'A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism'.

NOTE: This article was written before I saw Jones's article on federalism in IB 63. I have not tried to alter this article in order to take account of IB 63: a reply is being prepared separately.