Trotskyists debate Ireland
1939, mid-50s, 1969
Introduction: freeing Marxism from pseudo-Marxist legacy

By Sean Matgamna

"Since my early days I have got, through Marx and Engels, the greatest sympathy and esteem for the heroic struggle of the Irish for their independence" — Leon Trotsky, letter to Nora Connolly, 6 June 1936

In 1940, after the American Trotskyists split, the Shachtman group issued a ringing declaration in support of the idea of a “Third Camp” — the camp of the politically independent revolutionary working class and of genuine national liberation movements against imperialism.

“What does the Third Camp mean?”, it asked, and it replied:

“it means Czech students fighting the Gestapo in the streets of Prague and dying before Nazi rifles in the classroom, with revolutionary slogans on their lips.

“it means African natives going on strike in the Rhodesian copper mines and fighting bloody battles with the police.

“it means the Irish Revolutionary Army keeping green the traditions of the Easter Rebellion with a brilliant and implacable guerilla campaign against British authority in the heart of England.

“it means Indian steel and textile and jute workers forcing concessions from the British Raj in militant strikes.

“it means the Red Army soldiers who shot their officers and fratermized with their brothers in the Finnish army.

“it means the anti-conscription rioters in Australia, the millions of AFL and CIO rank-and-file whose pressure is causing American labor chiefs to talk isolationism, the Polish peasants who seized the land when the landowners fled and the Polish workers who set up short-lived Communes in Vilna and Lvov before the coming of the Red Army.

“No, the Third Camp is not a myth. It exists, and its members were legion: the submerged, smoldering working masses of the world, those who do the working and starving in peace-time and the dying in wartime. It is our aim and our revolutionary duty to organize these, to make our press the voice of the Third Camp”.

In fact, the IRA at that time was formally allied to Germany — to Hitler’s Germany. It pursued its own independent objectives, but it did it by actively aligning itself with England’s enemies.

The “Chief of Staff” of the right-wing segment of the divided IRA, Sean Russell, died in 1940 on a Germany submarine that was taking him back to Ireland.

Unlike Lenin, Martov, and the other socialists who made use of Germany’s wish to defeat Russia in World War I, and made a limited agreement that let them travel through Germany in a sealed train to the Finland station in St Petersburg, the IRA made a general alliance with Germany.

In principle, an oppressed nation has a right to ally with its enemy’s enemy, to try to use such an alliance for its own purposes. The Irish insurgents of 1916 had made an alliance with Germany. The Declaration of Independence which Patrick Pearse read out to a very small audience of accidential onlookers outside the General Post Office on the first day of the Rising, Easter Monday, spoke of the insurgents’ “gallant allies in Europe”.

In principle the 1940s IRA, too, had a right to ally with and use German imperialism for its own ends. But the idea that Ireland would be better off in a Europe dominated by Hitler-imperialist Germany, or that Irish anti-imperialists should want Hitler’s victory, because it meant British defeat, was, in political terms, and in terms of Ireland’s interests and need, stupid beyond words.

German victory would involve the enslavement to varying degrees of the peoples of Europe, including the English and the Northern Ireland Unionists; the literal enslavement of the Slavic peoples; the annihilation of Jews, gypsies, and god knows who else.

If nonetheless Irish nationalists, Irish “anti-imperialists”, could ignore the especially depraved and demented charac- ter of England’s imperialist enemy, and wanted it to prevail on the calculation that Catholic Nationalist Ireland might gain, that was nationalism (the nationalism of a very small part of the people of Europe), erected into absolute chauvinism taken to the level of political dementia.

And, of course, the IRA leaders who entered into agreement with Hitler represented only a very small segment of Irish opinion, even of generally anti-British Irish opinion.

The presum ption of the IRA, which literally saw itself as the legitimate government of Ireland, to pursue its own foreign policy, was one reason for the ruthlessness with which the Republican De Valera government suppressed it.

But it wasn’t just the right-wing IRA. On the same subma- rine on which Russell died was Frank Ryan, his long-time opponent in the Republican movement and leader of the “left” (i.e. Stalinist) Republicans throughout the 1930s. One of the participants in the mid-50s socialist discussion on Ireland reviewed in this pamphlet, Dominic Behan, invokes the name of Ryan as a left Republican saint.

After Russell’s death, Ryan chose to return to Germany, where he was an honoured guest of the government until his death from natural causes in 1944.

The full story is stranger still. In 1936 Ryan had taken 200 Republicans to fight in Spain against the Franco fascists. He was captured and came close to facing a fascist firing squad. He was then rescued by agents of the German state and wound up in Germany, where he worked voluntarily on assaying Irish and British politics for the Abwehr.

Last year — the anti-fascist who had almost died in the cause of anti-fascism — was most likely plunged into terminal po- litical confusion by the Hitler-Stalin pact.

The Stalinist strand of “Irish Republicanism” was not part of the Third Camp either. In 1940, during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, Stalinists were decidedly in one of the imperialist camps. They would change to the other imperialist camp when the Nazis invaded Russia in June 1941 but to not any sort of “Third Camp” position.

IRELAND AS EMBLEM

So why did the new-founded Workers’ Party include the Irish anti-imperialists in their picture of the Third Camp taking shape? Not that they were desperately short of examples of Third Camp forces, though surely they were, but of what Ireland and Irish Republicanism meant in the international com- munist movement of the 20th century.

Ireland: Irish revolution, Irish nationalism, and Irish Repub- licanism were emblematic of anti-imperialism, rather than something real to be analysed concretely.

Famously James Connolly wrote that “Ireland without her people means nothing to me”. For the left, by 1940 “Ireland” without her real people, an Ireland that was no longer the real Ireland, had come to be a token, a symbol or political token to be “coined” mechanically. The contrast between the “real Ireland” which those who composed that Third Camp declaration had in mind and the reality – Irish Republican al- lies, clients, and stooges of Nazi German and of Russian im- perialism — neatly sums all that up.

Ireland had a special place in the outlook of revolutionary socialists. Karl Marx had used Ireland’s history and the his- tory of its relationship with Britain extensively in Capital volume 1. Marx, Engels, and Marx’s daughters had been active and passionate supporters of the Fenian movement, and the literary expression of that support was in print. Everywhere

Contents

2. Introduction: freeing Marxism from pseudo-Marxist legacy, by Sean Matgamna
5. 1948: Irish Trotskyists call for a united Ireland with autonomy for the Protestant north-east
6. The Irish Trotskyists on trade-union unity in the 1940s
13. The first discussion in Socialist Review, 1957
16. The second discussion on Ireland, 1958
18. The 1968-9 discussion in IS (SWP) and its consequences
21. The gist of the 1969 “Troops Out” dispute
22. US Trotskyist debate in 1939
24. Timeline

This pamphlet is edited, and all unsigned articles in it are written, by Sean Matgamna

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When Britain refused to recognize the democratically elected parliament created by that secession, they fought a war with Britain in 1919-21. They won Dominion status (real self-government such as Canada and Australia had) in 1922 for 26 counties, all of Ireland bar six north-eastern counties given self-government but within Britain.

This is how The Communist, a paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain, summed up that history in July 1922: “For hundreds of years the Irish nation has been fighting an unceasing struggle, at fantastic odds, against the British Empire. For hundreds of years the Irish people have been resisting a hard and diabolically cunning tyranny. “Economically, this tyranny has kept Ireland poor, starving, and undeveloped. It was accompanied generation after generation by the worst forms of oppression. It produced untold miseries, famines, songs and music of revolt, a literature of protest, and so frequent was revolt and repression that the miseries are remembered fully now, the old songs are sung throughout the land, the old literature is being rewritten in more expressive terms.

“A few times, as when Davitt won for the peasantry land rights from the feudal lords, and Larkin organised strikes and threw the class war into relief, the people have been rallying on purely economic issues. But even in those struggles the national appeal had to be employed”.

THE “IRISH QUESTION” REDEFINED

Dominion status made it possible, stage by stage from then on, for the 26 Counties to attain real independence. Eamonn De Valera’s government removed the King of England as head of the Irish state during the abdication crisis in 1936. It negotiated a broad settlement, which included the removal of the last British naval bases, in 1938. It maintained neutrality during the Second World War. The “Irish question” was the Partition Question. Six counties in north-east Ulster had been formed into a sub-state within the United Kingdom but possessing Home Rule in a Belfast Parliament.

Within that, the old “Irish Question” transmuted into the Catholic question – the fact that there was a one third, and growing, Catholic minority in the Six Counties, a majority in a large part of the territory. Catholics in Northern Ireland were a bigger minority than all the Protestants would have been in a United Ireland. London left the Belfast government to its own devices, and the Catholics found themselves under a repressive Protestant-sectarian Northern Ireland government.

Most Republicans until the late 1930s had tended to accept the verdict of both segments in the 1922 Sinn Fein: nothing much could be done about partition as long as the majority in Northern Ireland wanted it to continue. But they were far from reconciled to that fact.

Mural of James Connolly

Mark and Engels were known. Ireland was known. Everywhere the history of Britain, the pioneering country of modern industrial and commercial civilisation, was known, the history of Ireland was also known. Everywhere Britain was resented or opposed, the history of Irish rebellion was known and often looked to as example and model.

Everywhere the armies of Catholic missionaries sent out from Ireland from the mid 19th century onwards reached, they brought their nationalist account of Ireland’s oppression, and Catholic Ireland’s indomitable refusal to bow down to their overlords. In 1980, when Robert Mugabe was in London to negotiate the settlement that created Zimbabwe, he made a quick trip to see the Ireland whose history he had learned about from Irish Catholic missionaries in his youth.

The picture of Ireland taken from Marx and Engels was fixed. The real Ireland evolved and changed. The “Irish question” was repeatedly revised and redefined in the course of history.

THE “IRISH QUESTION”

In the 1860s the Irish question was mainly three questions: land, Home Rule, and Disestablishment of the Anglican church, which was alien to both Ireland’s Catholics and its Protestants, the two majority religions on the island.

Karl Marx thought that the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 would eliminate the religious sectarian conflict. The Tory party thought that the series of Land Acts that turned peasant rent into lower annual mortgage payments would “kill Home Rule with kindness” (and many European Marxists came to think that too: Lenin polemized against Trotskyists debated Ireland)

The self-bewildering ideological lie that Britain was responsible for the Protestant-Unionist refusal to want to join a united Ireland was generated by the hard reality that there was no policy with which Irish nationalists could hope to change the situation. Only peaceful persuasion could conceivably change the political outlook of the Six County Protestant-Unionists.

But experience all over the world has shown that peaceful persuasion can not eradicate the consciousness of national or religio-national identity, or persuade one of the antagonists in such a conflict to adopt the identity of the other. Any prospect of concordantly being a Catholic Ireland in the 1920s was the transfer of the Catholic majority areas, including Derry City, to the Catholic Nationalist state. 26 Counties government leader Michael Collins had vainly appealed to the Belfast government in 1922 to transfer those areas to the Republic.

In any case, the swift conforming of the 26 county state to the worst Orange fears that “Home Rule would be Rome Rule” further encouraged and hardened the Northern Ireland Unionists to resist a united Ireland. The “Twofold Question” was an ideological lie.

The fundamental difficulty with this entire position was that it was based on an ideological lie. The diehard opponents of Irish unity in the 20th century were not the British but the one million Protestant-Unionists concentrated in north-east Ulster.

Certainly, in the past England had fostered and manipulated division in Ireland, but the cleavages had to exist before they could be manipulated. It was not even fundamentally true that Britain had deliberately “planted” the Protestant population in north-east Ulster. In the 15 and 16th centuries, England had “planted” Protestant settlers in parts of all the four provinces of Ireland, Munster, Leinster, Connacht and Ulster. The only area where a Protestant majority had come to cohere was in north-east Ulster – in territory that had not been “planted” by the British government. The population was the result of spontaneous migration, mainly from Lowland Scotland.

An essential element in 20th-century Irish history was the fact that Britain could not control the north-east Ulster opponents of a united Ireland. As late as May 1974 a powerful Protestant-Unionist general strike destroyed Britain’s chosen policy for Ireland, Catholic-Protestant power-sharing.

The “Two Nations” and a Little Loyal (Maybe) Orange Empire

There were about half a million Catholic nationalists in the six county sub-state. For some of them, the sizeable Catholic minority in Belfast for instance, their minority status would have been unavoidable in any partition. But most of them formed a majority in large areas along the border.

Nationalist Ireland attributed to England all or most of the blame for Partition. For some — the Fianna Fail current and the various editions of the Irish Republican Army after the late 30s — the solution was to persuade or (the physical-force Republicans) coerce Britain into ending partition despite Northern Ireland Protestant opposition.

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In 1957, in the same period as one of the Trotskyist discussions reported in this pamphlet, the “Fethard boycott” dramatised that dimension. The local Catholic priest, with support from his bishop and support or compliance from almost all the Catholics in the village of Fethard-on-Sea, they organised a boycott of Protestant-owned businesses and farms there. The local Protestant (Church of Ireland) school was forced to close, and the local piano teacher, a Protestant, lost her students. The reason was just that one local Protestant woman married to a Catholic man had refused to enrol her older daughter in the Catholic school. She quit the village rather than comply, moved to Scotland, was eventually reconciled with her husband, and educated her children at home.

There was always also an element in the impasse of some Catholics wanting the freedom to have their own Catholic state unencumbered by a need to take one million and more Protestants into account; but that was a subordinate element; at the beginning anyway.

The constitutional republic De Valera progressively eliminated the areas of nationalist grievance against England — the Oath of Allegiance to the British king, the paying back of debt by the farmers who had bought their land with the help of the British Exchequer, British Naval bases — the physical force Republicans were politically disarmed. There remained only the “Six Counties”, Partition.
The 1956-62 BORDER CAMPAIGN

For Republicans, Stalinists, and Stalinist-Republicans, the focus came to be on denouncing Northern Ireland as a police state for its treatment of the Catholic minority.

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The 26 counties had retreated behind high tariff walls at the beginning of the 1970s. To the economic-determinists "Marxists", this proved that the fear of such tariffs had been the primary motive behind Orange opposition to inclusion in an all island state.

"Marxists" sought for the economic explanation.

To understand partition, and why six and not four counties, we must remember that this was a time of empires, of people held against their will in states they had done without. Despite President Woodrow Wilson's talk of "self-determination for nations", the settlement of European affairs in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 created conglomerate states such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in which a number of minority peoples were held against their will and to various degrees treated as second-class citizens.

The partition settlement was a typical settlement of the time of the Versailles Treaty which sowed the seeds of the Second World War.

Marxists in the 30s referred to conglomerate states such as Czechoslovakia at the time of the Munich crisis, for example, as imperialist.

The minds of those who designed the partition of Ireland were saturated with the imperialist ideas of their time. Their fallback position was to the compact majority of Protestant-Unionists in north-east Ulster; but they desired to get as much as they could of Ireland for their all-Ireland minority "nation".

Also, Unionist leaders like Edward Carson, who had used the threat of partition in order to stop any home rule for any part of Ireland, did not conceive of partition as a permanent settlement.

According to one story, in Frank Gallagher's 1957 book The Invisible Island, during the negotiations on the eve of World War One Edward Carson tried to persuade the then national-

ist leader John Redmond to agree to the exclusion from Home Rule of nine counties, arguing that this would be a guarantee that partition could not become permanent. Maybe he knew that any argument to gain his point. What taken out as many as nine counties did really have that im-

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Much of socialist discourse on Ireland shows at its worst this process of Marxism being atrophied into a set of shibboleths, dead forms of words, filled with alien content. Marx and Engels analysed Ireland. They died; Ireland changed. Partial analyses of aspects of Ireland’s evolution were made by later Marxists influenced by Marx and Engels. Ireland evolved into two bourgeois states. And there, frozen at the point when the Communist International died as a Marxist, working-class organisation, “Marxism” on Ireland stopped.

Comments and analyses of Marx and Lenin (Lenin’s, I believe, radically wrong at the start: see my article on Lenin on Ireland in Workers’ Liberty 22-23, 1995) became timeless truths of the Stalinist church and gained wide influence by merging with left-wing petty-bourgeois Republicanism.

“Trotskyists” who thought they had done their duty as Marxists if they re-labelled what the Stalinists called “completing the bourgeois revolution” and straight Republicans called “reunifying Ireland” as “Permanent Revolution” instead, have been a part, and not the least influential part, of this process. Nobody who knows both Irish reality and Trotsky’s theory of “Permanent Revolution” could believe “Permanent Revolution” has any bearing on Irish politics! I have never in 50 years found anyone able to argue for its seriously. But many Trotskyists “believe” it. It is the common dogma, functioning as a licence for playing the chameleon to petty bourgeois nationalism.

Marxists, if they are Marxists, must draw from life, not from the dead or half-dead reflection of ever-changing life in old analyses. And they must, above all, learn from history.
The Irish Trotskyists on trade-union unity in the 1940s

Below is a leaflet produced by the Revolutionary Socialist Party, which was then the (small) Irish section of the Fourth International, some time soon after the splitting of the Irish trade union movement (Irish TUC) in 1945 by Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union leader William O’Brien and his allies.

Protesting against alleged “British domination” in the Irish TUC, they formed a separate Congress of Irish Unions, made up solely of Irish-based unions, and rejecting unions which organised both in Britain and in Ireland. The split would be healed in 1959, with the formation of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

There had previously (1944) been a split in the trade union-based Irish Labour Party, to form the National Labour Party, of which O’Brien was also a leader. The NLP complained of “communist domination” in the main Labour Party. In 1950, it merged back into the Labour Party.

TUC Betrayed! The present impasse in the TUC is not essentially a recent development, as the O’Brienite oppositionists try to infer. To the uninitiated, much less the sycophants “communist domination” in the main Labour Party. In 1950, he healed in 1959, with the formation of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

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The Irish Trotskyists on trade-union unity in the 1940s

“The Bolsheviks on national minorities

“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 . . . the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority...”

“This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc.”

(1913 Resolution of the Bolshevik Party Central Committee).

6 Workers’ Liberty
Matt Merrigan was a member of the small Irish Trotskyist group in the 1940s, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and a socialist all his life. He eventually became president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, and died in 2000.

In the mid-50s, for a while, he wrote reports on Ireland for Labor Action, the paper of the Independent Socialist League of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, and others in the USA.

Merrigan's first article on Ireland for Labor Action was on 19 September 1955. There had been nothing in 1954 Labor Action. His reappearance coincided with an obvious quickening of links, or a re-forging of links, or establishment of close links, between the ISL and Socialist Review (the group in Britain at the time led by Tony Cliff). I think Max Shachtman, or somebody, visited.

There were five items in 1955, six in 1956 and one in 1957. The last appearance was dated 29 April 1957.

Before Merrigan, you have to go back to 9 April 1951 for any comment at all in Labor Action on Ireland, a commemorative piece reprinted from the British ILP paper, Socialist Leader, by Dick Beach, one of James Connolly's sons-in-law.

1. Labor Action 19 September 1955

**Behind the IRA’s commando raids.**

**Festing sore: the partition of Ireland**

The Irish and English papers in the last few weeks have featured the Irish Republican Army’s raids on British military installations as precursors of an all-out campaign to focus world attention on the continued partition of Ireland by Britain.

The raid on Arborfield Barracks in Berkshire, England, by IRA commandos; and the removal of thousands of rounds of ammunition and a quantity of machine guns threw the British security forces into a state of nerves. Military and police activity recalled the 1939-41 bomb campaign by the IRA in English cities which culminated in hangings and prison sentences for IRA activists.

Petty bourgeois and fringed with fascists, the leadership of the IRA and Sinn Fein (its political mouthpiece) is a conspiratorial cloak and dagger sect. Its basic approach to national unity is emotional and hysterical. It proclaims that its mission is preordained and holy by virtue of its opposition to British imperialism. But it lacks an elementary understanding of the international role of imperialism in general, and is wholly out of touch with the social and national struggles of other colonial peoples.

The commando-like raids in Britain were preceded by attacks across the border into Northern Ireland. But the problem being confronted by armed fellow-Irishmen of the British army garrison in Northern Ireland was a propaganda difficulty unlikely to be encountered by attacks in Britain proper. Also in Britain the Irish, northern and southern, enjoy the same rights as British subjects and among the millions of emigrant Irish in Britain the IRA finds a fruitful field for sympathisers and recruits in the very heart of enemy territory.

Represive police measures against even moderate nationalist domiciled in Northern Ireland makes the extra-legal activity at the IRA doubly difficult in what is termed the occupied sectors of the country. Hence the actions in Britain.

Socialist influence in the ranks of the IRA and Sinn Fein is non-existent. Connolly’s association with the independence movement 40 years ago is hailed by them today as a vindication of their “progressiveness.” Connolly’s Marxist approach to the national question is misrepresented as having been super-patriotic and chauvinist.

The political labour movement as represented by the Labour Party in Ireland has no principled position on the anti-partition struggle. Therefore its attitude toward the IRA and its physical-force policy is utterly opportunistic. It seeks itself with problems peculiar to its State.

Labour unity is sorely hampered by the national question. A small centre for purely Irish unions exists in the Republic alongside the TUC. It represents a breakaway from the TUC some ten years ago over a charge of the domination of the Irish TUC by English unions (which were English by origin and extended their activities to Ireland) which were claimed to have a quasi-imperialist orientation. There is a germ of substance in this claim, for without a doubt these amalgamated unions recruited Irish labour for the war effort, and were assisted by the Stalinists to this end.

However the basic leadership of this nationalist centre is incorrigibly sectarian nationalist, and basically petty bourgeois in politics, though a few of its leaders still sentimentally, and for mostly corrupt reasons continue their membership in the Labour Party.

Northern Ireland capitalists, represented by shipbuilding and linen, believe that union with Britain serves their interests better than membership in an Irish Republic. Perhaps when Britain led the world’s manufacturing race and the Empire banked in economic sunshine while the colonial peoples perished in the shade there was some substance to this attitude. But today with Britain losing her edge in textiles and shipbuilding the economic backwater of Northern Ireland is fast becoming a stagnant pond. Yet the Trotskyist Party is as intransigent on the question of union as it was 30 years ago when it came to power.

Nevertheless, it still can, by manipulating anti-Catholic and anti-Republican prejudices, command a mass following even in periods of mass unemployment. The militant political-religious protestant Orange Order provides a fanatical loyalist counterweight to the threats of Republican fanaticism.

Add to this a very efficient gerrymandering of electoral areas which precludes the emergence of either a Nationalist or Labour opposition in the Northern Ireland parliament.
Irish Labourites on the griddle

Dublin, 6 September. Dubliners are facing a shut-down of transport, gas and other services at the weekend when strike notices expire.

The strike notices were handed in by “Larkin’s union” — the Workers Union of Ireland (WUI) — for a wage boost of 15 per cent. The WU has spearheaded what is known as the “fifth round” of wage increases, which takes its name from the number of increases conceded since the statutory restrictions on wages ended in 1947.

The Labour Court (an official conciliation-court without legal powers) has become so discredited that even the most conservative union officers refuse to use it in the circumstances. Industry and Commerce Minister Norton has been forced to convene a conference of both employers’ and workers’ organizations to attempt to shore up its falling prestige.

It is obvious that the government sees the impending economic storm and that Norton, the Labor handmaid of the government, has been given the dirty task of urging wage restraint on the unions. Clearly the “fifth round” may be the death knell of the government. The “Pull Down Prices” program of the Labor Party when it joined the government has proved to be an empty gimmick to justify fat jobs for the boys.

Further political storms are blowing up. Last fall, world tea prices began to soar, and the government, under pressure from the Labor Party, gambled on a price fall within the year, and subsidized the existing price by $4 million. But the price did not fall and, if the so-called minister of finance has his way there will be a 20 per cent rise in the present price of 75 cents per pound. If this happens, a revolt in the ranks of the Labor Party seems certain.

Labor in the government is committed to the full imple-mentation of De Valera’s Social Health Act of 1953. This finds an echo in the fall of the last coalition in 1951. A united front of Catholic bishops and the Irish Medical Association (IMA) at that time killed a more progressive measure piloted by the petty-bourgeois radical Dr. Browne. The De Valera government that took office that year under pressure from Browne & Co (who held the balance of power) resurrected the bill in a watered-down form; but again the bishops and the IMA succeeded in delaying portions of the act. The Labor Party is again committed to the “implementation in full of the 1953 Health Act.”

It will be interesting to watch the Labor strategists manoeu-ve to keep their lush jobs by avoiding an open break with the reactionary ministers in the cabinet on this issue.

3. Labor Action 17 October 1955
Irish flirt with German finance

In a recent speech in Germany, Norton, Labor’s Minister for Industry, dismissed the government’s proposals, indicated the Irish government’s desire to facilitate the investment of German industrial capital in Ireland.

Sharp criticism of the proposals came from British capital-ist circles, and underlined the imperial preference enjoyed by Ireland under several trade pacts. Warnings were issued that any attempt to allow German capital to penetrate Britain’s market via the Irish back door would necessitate a review of the Irish trade position. This would be a severe body-blow to the Irish economy.

Another situation the development of which has a tremen-dous bearing on the Irish economy is the proposed absorp-tion of Denmark into the British Commonwealth. In terms of bacon, butter, eggs, dairy and farm produce, rearrangement following on this constitutional alignment would mean a virtual squeeze out of Irish produce from British markets. But an element of balance introduced into the lopsided in-dustrial economy of Britain would be of inestimable value to Britain, and could well help to solve her balance of payments position.

Strike threats

The expected shut-down of transport and gas services in the city mentioned in my last letter did not take place.

At the eleventh hour the intervention of the Catholic Arch-bishop of Dublin in the gas dispute led to further talks between transport workers and the employers and the eventual acceptance by the workers of a contract only differing in a minor degree (question of retroactive payment for two weeks) from the original offer, i.e., increases rang-ing from 8 per cent to 10 per cent in basic rates.

Transport workers agreed to await the findings of the Labor Court. The court recommended the employers pay in-creases up to 12 per cent of basic wages.

The members of two out of three transport unions in the city’s services accepted the court’s recommendation. The third union, the Workers Union of Ireland (WUI), rejected the recommendation, though it is reported that the National Executive will recommend its acceptance, because the WUI has a minority of transport workers.

Another strike threat, if given effect, will assume the char-acter of a general strike, by the Fitters or Engineers (Machinists). These men maintain and service all mechanized operations in transport, power, newspapers, airways, hospita-ls, etc. Any east European ruler, it runs by virtue of these men. A strike of this kind could paralyze the country.

Cosmic Truth

From the Plough to the Stars! The International Astronome-ical Association held its 1955 conference in Dublin. A six-man Russian delegation, together with several colonial stopage dele-gations, including the rare sight of a delegation from the Russian Workmen and Peasants Union, arrived in the country.

The leader of the delegation in his only public utterance re-furred to the “warm friendship that existed always between the Russians and Irish peoples.” Yet repeated Russian vettos have kept Ireland out of the UN! Cosmic truth has nothing to do with Stalinist illusion.

The unfortunate plight of the Stalinist scientists was under-scored by an article in the weekly tabloid Times Picto-rial justifying continued support for the government.

It is abundantly clear that these Labor politicians are doing their damnedest to hold down their fat jobs in the adminis-tration and perhaps a ministerial pension as well after years in office. The continued support of the government must be decided by a policy resolution at the party’s annual confer-ence next year. Hence the “theoretical” smokersnke for the membership.

The Stalinist under-cover-men in the Labor Party’s Dublin organization have in this connection emerged as the “radical” theoreticians of MacDonalldism, i.e., of coalitionism. And the pay-off? It is membership, in this, that and the other gov-ernmental commissions where Labor ministers have influ-ence, in consideration of dirty chores done.

On the other hand, the official Stalinist organization, the Irish Workers League, has come out in its organ Workers’ Voice with devastating “Third Period” attacks on the coaliti-on.

Yet their darling, Deputy Jim Larkin (who scorns their own political advances), has consistently acted as a left cover for Irish Labor and the genuine working class leaders. He has all but claimed his mantle of political respectability, and it seems unlikely that the Stalinists will ever again get near enough to derober him and lay bare his former association with the Stalinist movement in this country of some 20 years ago.

Reached a crisis

It is evident that the Irish Labor Party has reached a crisis in its evolution. Economic and political events are posing the question of a radical transformation of the economic and so-cial basis of Irish society: the undercapitalisation of the land and industry; unemployment and mass emigration as a per-manent feature of the economy; the demagogic appeal by the biggest of the two conservative parties (De Valera’s) for the erection of a welfare state to disorient working class support for the Labor Party; the clerical stranglehold that virtually holds the potential for struggle, the ideological and physical motives for a further push along the road of human progress and freedom in Ireland. This is the prac-tical issue that is never faced by the Realpolitikers of the Irish Labor Party.

Trotskyists debate Ireland

Irish Laborites under attack for coalition collaboration policy

Dublin, 12 October. The coalition government in Ireland is losing some sleep over the economic crisis which is daily gathering momentum, with inflation and the price-wage spira-tus having their effect on the workers standards.

The cornerstone of the government is threatened by the militant attitude of the unions as the latter seek to preserve their wage positions. Labor Party elements in the coalition are leading this anti-socialist, anti-democratic movement.

These Laborites are attempting to ally the mounting crit-icism against their wretched policy of collaboration with the clerical-ridden reactionaries of Fine Gael (United Ireland), through a series of articles in the weekly tabloid Times Picto-rial justifying continued support for the government.

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Dublin, 16 November. Moves are afoot to unite the two trade-union centres — the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Congress of Irish Unions (CIU). Next January, delegate conferences of both centres will discuss a joint unity document after ten years of separate existence.

The political and psychological conditions attendant on the split in 1945 are now virtually non-existent. The political monopoly of De Valera from 1932 to 1948 has been broken. Lemaist, De Valera’s lieutenant, when faced with a political radicalization of the workers in the early war years, exploited a bitter personal quarrel in the leadership of the TUC. It is assumed generally that Lemaist conspired with right-wing leaders to break away, by means of political patronage, in their aims to snatch the membership of the so-called “English” unions. The substance of this claim is that the 1941 Trade Union Act gave the Irish unions legal powers to put comparable “English” unions out of business. Therefore those elements who connived with Lemaist needed some “principle” justification to start member-snatching.

It was obviously that the split was a temporary measure under the law, Irish union leaders with unspcionous designs on “English” union members had to leave the TUC. This is where the justifiable “principle” enter. The chauvinist slogan of “Irish union” — the Ireland of the Irish unions was calculated to start an avalanche of members from the TUC, which was overloaded with “English” unions.

However, the break was confined to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (led by an “Irish Gompers” if there ever was one — William O’Brien) and several small craft unions with ambitious officers. As an organizational precaution, the secession was a dismal failure. The only attempt by an Irish union to use the legal device was defeated by a High Court decision handed down to the National Union of Railwaymen in 1947, decreeing that the relevant section of the act was unconstitutional.

The following year, 1948, set the seal on the decline of the CIU. In that year De Valera’s 16 years of uninterrupted rule was ended by his defeat in the general election. From there on, the life of the CIU has been characterized by several splits-off into the TUC, and a rapprochement by sections of the CIU leadership with the TUC-based Labor Party. With the declining fortunes of De Valera’s Fianna Fail (Tory) party, the CIU bureaucracy finds it difficult to peddle its political wares profitably. Hence the move toward unity.

In any event, this situation is the needs of the Labor ministers in the government coalition. Norton, the senior Labor minister, is charged with “making the economy work,” but is hampered by the militant wage-happy mood of the union ranks.

Add to this, the leaders of both congresses are sensitive to the competitive uncertainties of separate existence. A wage movement initiated by the smallest affiliate of either congress is poised upon by its opposite number in the other congress and a whole pattern of wage demands unfolds. Union officers dare not concede the militant initiative to their opposite number. Union organization could come to grief for a living union.

In this climate, Norton hasn’t an earthly chance of getting top union agreement on wage restraint.

Norton also hopes that in a united congress the corrupt right-wing CIU elements will hog-tie any potential threat from the very critical elements in the TUC, who at the last Labor Party conference came out sharply against the coalition’s economic policy, which was being touted by Norton on the conference platform, a policy amounting to recommending laissez-faire to the unions. Strive in the wind: a proportionately higher number of CIU bureaucrats have been placed in the several non-elective adjuncts to the elected administration.

If I credit Norton with this grandiose strategy it is because he is the Machiavell in the government ranks. The capitalistic masters are unfairly hated by the working class, and unless Norton can circumspect the growing critical mood of the workers the government’s days are numbered.

Dublin Trade Union Council, which is the only significant working-class body that has consistently exposed the corrupt and right-wing character of the Labor Party leadership and its tradition policy, from a socialist standpoint. Norton, Labor’s senior minister, who is as well a labor-lacker as ever graced any socialistic government, is keenly alarmed by the outspoken critical role of the Council.

Dublin, 22 January 1956. On 5 January the two trade union centres — the Trade Union Congress and the Congress of Irish Unions — held special conferences to discuss and decide on the unity document drawn up by their respective teams of negotiators. The negotiators had met some two dozen times within two years, under the chairmanship of Prof. Bastedo (University College, Cork).

The special conferences voted for the unity proposals contained in the document, by substantial majorities.

In the case of the CIU, it is reported that the decision was unanimous. This is a far cry from the CIU’s anti-unity intransigence of even four years ago.

The anti-unity forces at the TUC meeting rolled up one-third of the votes cast. This was surprising, since the initiative on unity had been taken by the TUC.

The anti-unity vote at the TUC meeting was drawn from the Woodworkers, the Engineeirs, and the bureaucractized Irish offshoot of the Transport & General Workers Union, together with a sprinkling of native time-servers whose independent and factional activities would be eclipsed in a united movement. The three unions mentioned above are what are colloquially known as “English unions” by virtue of the fact that, their headquarters are in Britain, and they represent at worst the Unionist mentality on the trade union level. (“Unionist” means favouring political union with Britain.)

Actions such as these lay bare the basic political division on the national question and the constitutional character of the two states in Ireland: one existing by integration proper in the United Kingdom, and the other born of the independent struggle and its political attitudes subjectively conditioned by that struggle, though economically and objectively dependent on Britain’s patronage.

The unity document itself provides for the setting up of a provisional unionized organization of a federal character with a 16-man steering committee, which is the TUC, with the task of providing a constitution and the consummation of the merger by 1962. The congresses in a formal sense will continue their separate existences, but the emphasis will be on joint activity at every level and at every juncture.

Quite probably the first major task will be on future wage policy and movements, costs and prices. Now the credit squeeze attendant on the one per cent increase in the bank rate must immediately affect costs and prices. Unemployment is mounting and the official index stands at 60,000 at the moment. This must be further amplified as manufacturers cut back stockpiling and plant expansion on bank overdrafts, in the face of the jacked-up bank rates. Building, municipal and speculative, for working-class and middle-class housing will take a nose-dive by putting rents and mortgage repayments out of income reach.

The background of the economic facts of life in Ireland today continues the latest activity of Minister Norton, the Labor Party’s leader. Norton’s attempt to sell Ireland to U.S. capitalists on the American model, an export market for a tax ride or the prelude to a deal on NATO. It is not mere coincidence that Premier Costello is to lecture on Constitutional law at Yale later this year.

It should be remembered that a major policy decision on Ireland’s external relations was announced at an international gathering of lawyers in Canada in 1949 by the same Mr. Costello who was the prime minister at the time of the EEC talks. It is well known that Norton is the government’s “fixer.” Sincere apologies to bona-fide stage-managers. Congratulations to the TUC conference, it was remarkable if only for the bizarre antics of the Stalinists. Betty Sinclair, a leading Stalinist militant representing the Belfast Trades
Council, lashed the anti-unity leaders of the Woodworkers and the Transport Workers for their capitulation to the sectarian and opportunist Tory politics of Unionism (political union with Britain). Holmes, a former faithful Stalinist back in the Transport Workers’ Belfast sector, moved the reference back of the unity document. In the voting line-up, Sinclair and the un inhibited Stalinists in the Electrical Trade Union voted solidly for unity, while the Stalinists in the various levels of the bureaucracy of the Woodworkers, Transport Workers and Engineers jumped into line when their union top brass sounded the rally.

A feeling of optimism has pervaded the ranks of the move- ment again on the morrow of the unity moves. The industrial weaknesses attendant on the existence of a formal organisa- tional break, particularly in industries where there is a mul- tiplicity of unions, are within reach of correction.

Long overdue steps to rationalize and assess jurisdiction on the basis of industries and functions can now be taken. The educational work of the movement can be given an enor- mous push forward and the most important element is the reintegration of the Labor Party as a potentially powerful ve- hicle of the political aspirations of the Irish working class.

7. Labor Action 5 March 1956
Irish Labor left is pushing for break with government coalition

Dublin, 23 February. The political situation here is pregn- ant with possibilities for the Labor left. Hard on the heels of the setting up of the provisional united trade-union centre, Larkin and Conrey, leaders of the country’s two largest gen- eral unions, have come out sharply against the know-nothing policies of the government coalition (which includes the Irish Labor Party) in the face of the economic crisis.

Conrey and Larkin, both obviously under pressure from their members, have demanded increased public control of banking and credit and, in turn, at union gatherings and Labor forty membership meetings, flayed the government for the shift to economic chaos, inherent in the moth-eaten cap- italist device of deflation.

Growing unemployment and soaring prices at the same time underscore the absolute dependence of the Irish econ- omy. Full employment in Britain and West Europe inflates the cost of materials and services with devastating effect on the Irish price structure. The Tory credit squeeze in Britain is calculated to depress consumption and investment in an ef- fort to sustain the balance of foreign payments and to boost exports at competitive prices, in the cut-throat climate of the world market.

The automatic application, by the Irish government (in- cluding its Labor ministers) of the British Tory chancellor’s deflationary measures to a situation (underinvestment and chronic underemployment) that is basically different from Britain is deepening the crisis of Irish capitalist society.

Even that diffident apostle for capitalism, De Valera, was prompted to remark, in a by-election speech at Kerry last week, that the incompetence of this capitalist coalition ad- ministration was imperilling the existence and social solidar- ity of bourgeois interests, by their routine attitude of the government to the needs of the economy.

He said that two currents of political thought found solace in the growing crisis: the “back-to-Britain” school, who de- ignated the independence movement, and the revolutionary socialists, who would exploit the economic breakdown. He hardly had in mind the Labor Party or the Stalinists in his reference to revolutionary socialism.

Against this background a minor revolt is scheduled for the Labor Party conference in April, a revolt against contin- uing Labor support to the coalition. Several motions submit- ted demand an action program that the party would use to highlight a break with the capitalist parties in the govern- ment: measures like nationalization of the banks, of the flour- mills, soak-the-rich taxes, import-export control, and state purchasing abroad to cut out the agents who dishel up the cost.

Labor Minister Norton can be expected to blow his top, be- cause he is the minister responsible for the economic well- being of the country, as well as being the senior Labor

8. Labor Action 9 April 1956
Coalition vote falls in Irish by-election

Dublin, 16 March. Hang together or hang separately: that is the axiom of the government coalition. In the North Kerry by-election, it was De Valera against the rest, namely, against the government coalition of the conservative Fine Gael, Labor Party, Farmers, and Republicans, all ganged up to present a facade of unity to the voters.

The government candidate was a nominee of the Republi- canes, the daughter of the late deputy whose place was being filled, following his death in a road accident. She had been press-ganged into the election by the ward-heeling require- ments of Irish politics. A girl of 21, her only political attrib- utes were her father’s name and his tragic death.

However, the combined government vote behind her went down by 200, while De Valera’s rose by 900, indicating a perceptible shift from the government parties.

Factors were the economic crisis, and the palpably dema- gogic line of De Valera’s party, which was possible because there was no working class party independently in the running pledged to a program of radical economic and social change. The Labor Party is part of the coalition, unfortu- nately.

Confusion worse confused characterized the Stalinist parrots here on the line of the 20th Congress. Stalin, stripped of his diabolical divinity by his former lieutenants, has left the party followers floundering in an ideological morass. Years of automatic responses and monolithic concepts will stand them in good stead however.

9. Labor Action 6 August 1956
Irish Labour left loses out

Dublin, July 1. The 1956 conference of the Irish Labor Party has come and gone. The revolt of the ranks against the con- tinued line-up of the ministers in the capitalist coalition which was anticipated by this correspondent fizzled out. The only socialist criticism of the coalition came from two isolated sec- tions of the party, N. Wicklow and Dublin S. W.

The N. Wicklow comrades withdrew the motion “to leave the government” at the last moment but only in order to avoid an outright and overwhelming endorsement of the col- laborationist line of the leaders; but first there was a long de- bate that underscored the torpor of the ranks on the crucial question for the party’s future.

Nonetheless, the anti-coalition utterances of non-affiliated union leaders and isolated criticisms by local party leaders have had their effect on the Labor coalition cabal led by Norton. In his reply to the “break the coalition” debate, he was the soul of democratic humility.

Whereas in the past he has thundered against the subver- sive socialist minority and heaped personal abuse on the heads of the few socialists who dared expose his policy of capitulation to the forces of capitalist political reaction, on this occasion he offered his “title deeds of office” (as he termed it) to the party’s parliamentary group or to the party conference at any time, if either one or the other body indicated this course. He knew in advance of course that his personal influ- ence and his ability to settle out large to the faithful made such a demand unreal at this juncture.

Just prior to the conference, about a half-dozen party mem- bers from the Dublin organization were hauled before an in- quiry, an-official commission of the party and were accused of activities “harmful to the party”. It was generally assumed that pre-conference discussions among socialist members was being used to suspend their membership and preclude their attendance at the conference. It is reported, however, that several members of the commission had very red faces when the session ended. As usual the dirty hatchet work was shared by a brace of former Communist Party members.
Trotskyists debate Ireland

Body-blow to CP

Speaking of the post-Stalin Stalinists: Feverish moves are being made to erect a front organization with an organ like the New Statesman and Nation. Hard on the heels of the Krushchev line-switch, overtures were being made even to intransient anti-CP elements for support to the venture. The CP, which never really amounted to much here at any juncture, has suffered a tremendous body-blow to its coterie of members and sympathizers by the debunking of Stalin. For them, with their minds conditioned by Catholic authoritarian doctrine, the passage to Stalin worship was quite effortless. The subsequent expose by Krushchev, of Stalin’s undivine character in certain selected fields, has brought the whole doctrinal edifice into question.

The Catholic Church in Ireland is bound to benefit at the expense of the Irish Workers’ League (the CP). The Catholic Church, ever awake in its propaganda activities, has recently featured at its Sociological Congress none other than Douglas Hyde, ex-editor of the English Daily Worker, no doubt with the intention of recruiting the totalitarian faithful back to Rome. Unemployment will become a real problem in this country as full employment in Britain becomes less full and as the impact of automation is really felt on the British economy. Unless emigration to the U.S. and the Dominions supersedes the middle class in political control. Their quid pro quo for their revolutionary activity was economic hegemony. They evolved away from the social implications of the Proclamation of 1916 — inspired by Connolly — and became the integrated ruling capitalist class that we know today.

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Side by side with the growing conservatism of the petty bourgeoisie, the nondescript Labor leaders became equally conservative in their social and political attitudes. Bit by bit, the revolutionary socialist theses of Connolly were expunged from the Labor and trade-union movement. The socialistic demagogy of De Valera underscored the bankruptcy of the Labor leaders. The country settled down to the sodden rule of the middle class for 20 years.

During this time the Catholic hierarchy emerged as a major political factor in the recession of the Irish Labor Party as an independent socialist party. It was the Irish National Teachers’ Organization (no doubt acting on the instruction of, the hierarchy) that, at the 1938 Labor Party conference, sponsored the motion to remove from the constitutional aspiration that “the aim of the party is the establishment of a workers’ republic.”

The adoption of that motion formalized a political reaction that had long since been a fact.

Today the Irish Labor Party is caricature of a social-democratic party. Though partly based on the trade unions, it is nevertheless, in the matter of political and economic theory, far to the right of the Trade Union Congress, though the TUC has a working agreement with it.

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How long this modus vivendi will continue is hard to say. The labor movement is proceeding apace and the balance of forces may well alter politically inside the Labor Party when full unity is consummated.

For Irish socialists this development offers a fruitful field of work. Greater trade-union influence in the party will be a means of correcting the non-class mentality that has condemned the Irish Labor Party to the role of providing a lucrative living for a select bunch of unscrupulous politicians exploiting the devoted allegiance of workers who were nurtured in the Connolly tradition of independent labor politics.

11. Labor Action 15 October 1956

The Irish Labor Party: a sketch

To describe the Irish Labor Party within its present limits as analogous to the British Labor Party would be inaccurate indeed.

Ideologically and organizationally they differ as do the economies from which they derive sustenance. The Irish Labor Party with its rural bias is in a much weaker position organizationally than is the urban-based BLP. In the British Party there is a constant stimulus from trade-union consciousness flowing over into social-democratic political forms; this gives the BLP its stable proletarian character. This element is absent from Irish Labor politics today. What trade-union militancy did emerge in the early days of the petty industrialization of the larger towns was sidestepped off into the all-class crucible of the independence movement.

In the early days of the Second World War when a radical ferment was induced by attempts to cripple the unions by imposition of a wage freeze, the Irish Labor Party made some remarkable headway throughout the country. Tragically, however, a bitter personal feud at the top of the Trade Union Congress was manipulated by the Tory-nationalist party of De Valera; and the TUC, after the Labor Party split down the middle. What was termed the national wing — which had initiated the break — rehabilitated the decimated Fianna Fail party of De Valera for a further period.

Ideologically the Labor Party, from its birth at the Trade Union Congress of 1912 till the middle ’30s, bore the imprint of James Connolly’s socialist philosophy. After Connolly was executed for leading the first workers’ army against the British imperial power in Ireland in 1916, the tempo of the direct-actionist struggle for national independence tended to blunt the edge of the class struggle. Bourgeois revolutionaries and patriotic mercenaries dwarfed the post-Connolly mediocrity of Irish Labor.

The new Irish state born in 1922 found the revolutionary middle class in political control. Their quid pro quo for their revolutionary activity was economic hegemony. They evolved away from the social implications of the Proclamation of 1916 — inspired by Connolly — and became the integrated ruling capitalist class that we know today.

Silence is golden. Now the wrath of members and local leaders who see the looming economic storm that will shatter their domestic fortunes has exploded in the August precincts of P.U.O. headquarters.liners, last year’s P.U.O. president, profitably admonished the two governments in the country (Dublin and Belfast) to show no favouritism on their lack of sensitivity for workers’ needs. One can expect a lack of sensitivity from the archaic Tory Unionist regime in Belfast; but when among the Dublin ministers are ex-TUC presidents, whose governmental policies are less humane than the double-dyed Tories in Belfast, why the attempt to whitewash them?

Binks referred to the crisis at all because the Dublin TUC had issued a call for demonstrations and protest meetings to head off further measures being contemplated to dismiss workers from public and government services. The Council further demanded that the national trade-union centres, in line with long-standing policy decisions, move against the government and put the squeeze on the Labor ministers, or break with them completely.

Larkin, a member of the P.U.O. and a Labor deputy to boot, sensing the mood of the ranks, came out at a Regional Labor Party Conference with a sharp attack on the government, in-
cluding its Labor contingent, to head off the harmless specula-
tion of the rank-and-file movement for militant action. This is Larkin’s Stalinist training being applied against the left. He has been a consistent and demagogic supporter of the coal-
tion and it was he who laid down the blueprint for Labor’s participation in the present government at the 1953 Labor Party conference paving the way for the right-wing leader-
ship (Norton and Co.) to lavish the small socialist opposition.

In preserving this government set-up, he has used his trade-union position to head off and damp down any mili-
tant anti-government movement. Now threatened with the loss of his parliamentary sinecure, he publicly criticizes what he privately upholds and created and what he voted to con-
inue at the jamboree which the cabinet convened to bolster their trembling fortunes in the face of trade-unionist revolt.

To help sustain the rank-and-file revolt, the Dublin Trades Council is sponsoring a mass protest meeting on the eve of the autumn reassembly of Parliament. On the other hand the TUC has convened — so the story goes — two special conferences for both parts of the country to discuss the situation — this only in the face of clamour from its unemployed and em-
igrating members, and perhaps too late to avoid complete breakdown in living standards.

It is indeed time for the Irish trade-union movement to re-
orient its political thinking and put socialism on the agenda. When Irish workers cease to be pariahs in their own land, they will also cease to be a threat to the living standards of the English brethren who have placed the struggle for social-
ism as a top priority on their political list.

12. Labor Action 29 April 1957

Irish vote punishes Laborites

Dublin, 6 April. The coalition government in Ireland is down; the general election is over; and as I write, the votes are being counted.

McBride, one-time leader of the direct-actionist Irish Re-
publican Army, and a constitutionalist since 1947 when he launched his Republican Party, withdrew the support of his three deputies from the government. The course he adopted was urged upon the Irish Labor Party repeatedly in the last 18 months; but the coup de grace was administered by the clever, manoeuvring, opportunist and demagogic lawyer.

Observers are puzzled by McBride’s action. While un-
doubtedly the tide was running high against the government in recent months, McBride as late as last October supported a motion of confidence in the coalition at an all-party jamboree held to boost the morale of the government’s parlia-
mentary ranks.

It is true that on economic issues he has been mildly criti-
cal of the lack of government policies to beat the crisis of mass unemployment. On the issue of the physical-force IRA and the government’s measures to deal with the problem, he has at no time, however, indicated clearly where he stood on the current campaign of engaging in violence across the border.

It is known that the rump of his party, which is largely com-
posed of ex-IRA activists, was chafing at the authorities’ use of the Offences Against the State Act to disperse the IRA, and had thrown down the gauntlet to him to get out and break the government. This he did by presenting a no-confere-
ence motion to be taken at the spring session of the parlia-
ment.

Fianna Fail (De Valera’s party) was not to be outmaneu-
vered, however. Rather than troop into the lobby behind McBride (whom they detest with an all-pervading fervour) on his terms, they indicated their intention to present a no-
confidence motion themselves. Sensing the ignominy of a protracted and discreditable debate, the government dis-
solved parliament to cut their political losses. But too late. De
Valera has skated home with something to spare.

The workers, appalled by the utter disregard for principles and ethics by the Labor ministers in the coalition govern-
ment, have given the Labor Party its answer. The small pre-
election force of 19 deputies has been reduced to 12.

Some commentators suggest that this was better than ex-
pected. Those who were returned were outstanding person-
alities, whose membership in the Labor Party has always been only incidental to their ward-heeling activities.

Larkin, sensing the mood of the people, and a possible de-
feat at their hands in South Dublin, refused to contest his seat, which he has held uninterrupted for 14 years. But he can ac-
cept a large measure of the blame for the debacle. He had consistently defended and advocated the coalition inside the Labor Party, from his spurious left position, which derives from his Stalinist associations of long ago.

An indication of the decadence of the Irish Labor Party is the fact that the son of James Connolly, Roddy, con-
tested Larkin’s seat for the party and polled a paltry 1700 votes, com-
paring second-last, in a field of 10 candidates.

The militant Unem-
ployed Protest Com-
m ittee had their nominee, John Mur-
phy, an unemployed carpenter, elected in this constituency.

Murphy’s victory spotlights the mass proportions that the unem ployment figures had assumed under the coalition in its last months of office.

The highlight of the election was the return of Dr. Noel Browne in Dublin Southeast.

Dr. Browne, a demo-
cratic socialist, has had a turbulent existence since entering political life some 10 years ago. At that time he was re-
turned in the 1948 gen-
eral election as a Republican deputy. His party shared office in the coalition with Labor and the Conser-
vative Fine Gael,

Browne becoming minister for Health.

True to his promise, he proceeded to put medicine and the health services on a socialist basis. In 1951, just three years after taking office, the culmination of his efforts was a free Mother and Child Health Service. The powerful Irish Medical Association and the Catholic hierarchy united on a cash and moral basis to defeat the measure.

McBride, the Machiavellian lawyer overshadowed in the party by the brilliant, industrious and honest Browne, drove him from the party and thereby brought the coalition crash-
ing to the ground.

Browne and several of his colleagues who had fought for a secular and socialist accent on politics in Ireland, betrayed by their natural allies, the clerical-indulgent Labor Party, had remarkable successes at the subsequent general election: but they compromised their whole position by actively support-
ing and subsequently outrightly joining De Valera’s party. Browne’s socialist and secular views found little response in De Valera’s party, which had long since jettisoned its left wing.

The party machine refused to accept Browne as a candi-
date, and, under pressure from liberals, socialists, left Laborites and even one or two republicans, he consented to stand in his old constituency of Dublin Southeast as an independent social-
democrat. His victory was remarkable; he polled nearly as many votes as the outgoing prime minister, Costello.

It is interesting to note that perhaps the most militant and active socialist members of the Labor Party’s Dublin organi-
ization flocked to support and vote for Browne, the only ac-
knowledged and uncompromising socialist in the whole campaign, including the Labor Party candidates.

Not even the son of Connolly, who was perhaps the greatest socialist Ireland has produced, felt impelled to refer to this great movement which is the hope of humanity everywhere. Browne — the middle-class idealist, the man of integrity, iso-
}lated— and surrounded by a handful of adherents — has raised the banner of socialist working-class politics from the mire of the Labor Party sewer.

The victory of Murphy, candidate of the Unemployed Protest Committee, is both a tribute to the class-conscious-
ness of the workers of South Dublin and the Trojan efforts of a tiny group of Stalinist militants who promoted Murphy to-
gether with a leading Jesuit (each struggling to cancel out the influence of the other). Truly a remarkable set-up!

These sidelights on the election serve to pick out the posi-
tive class features. The overwhelming victory of De Valera (an effective majority of 15-20 votes) was not a pro-De Valera expression but an uncontrolled revulsion against the indif-
ferentism and bankruptcy of the coalition parties.

Even the sectarian and negative Sinn Fein (the political or-
ganization of the physical-forcists) which is pledged to ab-
stention from parliament, had a remarkable success, with four deputies elected and polling 50,000 first-preference votes. It appeared as a “new hope” to the cynical and apa-
thetic mass.

What progress would an independent socialist-led Labor Party have made in the context? The decadence of the cap-
italist parties would have been thoroughly exposed to soci-
alist analysis; and the political conclusions drawn by the working class would have placed a majority Labor govern-
ment on the political agenda within the next five years.
The first discussion in Socialist Review, 1957

“Their position was that there should be two Irish socialist revolutions, and Irish unity. The Stalinists were notorious among Trotskyists for advocating a two-stage Irish revolution — first “full” independence and reunification, then socialism. SR would stand this idea on its head: first two separate socialist revolutions, then unification.”

PATRICIA RUSHTON

Socialist Review contracts out the job of explaining the “Irish question” to Patricia Rushton, secretary of the “Movement For Colonial Freedom”.

This organisation was led by the Labour MP Ferrier Brockway — who had been a leader of the ILP until the mid-forties — and similar well-meaning people.

Patricia Rushton will for a while write for Socialist Review on other “colonial” questions, such as Central Africa. Her “Irish Politics Today” (May 1957) says nothing about the new Socialist Review formula.

Rushton’s language suggests a CP or CP-influenced background; her outlook is that of an Irish populist nationalist; her account of things is what the Connolly Association, the CP Irish “front” in Britain, is saying in pamphlets and in its monthly paper Irish Democrat. These ideas have a widespread influence in the British labour movement, and in the labour Party too. They will be permed in the subsequent discussion.

There are “two real issues in Irish politics today”, she tells SR readers, Partition and unemployment, and the emigration which is the result of unemployment. She puts the total at 40,000 a year from the not-quite three million population of the 26 counties. Unemployment, she tells SR readers, is the result of Partition. “Having failed to solve [Partition, the Irish Government] have therefore failed to make any impression on unemployement and immigration”

Supposedly designed to “protect the [protestant-Unionist] minority” on the island, in fact Partition has “viscously attacked the welfare of the [all-Ireland] majority”.

Partition has created evils such as Catholic Church domination in the South, evils that are in turn used to justify Partition.

Without the exclusion of the “potentially radical” working class of the North, the Catholic Church would not be so dominant in the South.

She quotes James Connolly in 1914 that Partition would disrupt and destroy the labour movement and “help the Home Rule [nationalist] and Orange (Unionist) capitalists and clerics to keep their political rallying cries before the public… and would make division more intense and confusion of ideas and positions more confounded”.

This, Connolly’s assessment of the likely consequences of Partition, is common stock on the anti-Partitionist left. Connolly had written that partition would bring “a carnival of reaction”, North and South. (But his conclusion from that prospect was not the common stock of the Left. It was that, therefore, rather than Partition it would be better that no part of Ireland should have Home Rule). Rushton sees Partition not as a consequence of the chronic antagonism between Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-nationalist Ireland, but as the cause and origin of this division. “With the workers divided, reactionary governments have ruled in Ireland on both sides of the Border.” The result is mass unemployment and emigration.

Under a cross-head, “Death of a Labour Party”, Rushton explains that Irish Labour “lost its constructive socialist thinker” when the British firing squad killed James Connolly in May 1916, 41 years earlier.

Two politically similar bourgeois parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, dominate 26 County politics.

The non-socialist Labour Party, participant in two coalition governments, has become a satellite of the weakest of them, Fine Gael, with no distinctive politics of its own.

The unemployed in Dublin have stood Jack Murphy in Dublin South Central, and won a Dail seat. Noel Browne, a noted critic of the Catholic Church in Irish politics, with the backing of many Labour Party members, has stood in Dublin as an independent, and won. She thinks that the power of the Catholic church is greatly exaggerated. People would vote left if the Labour Party gave them the chance to. “If the Labour Party had a genuinely socialist policy, and had run a militant campaign, they would not have suffered the losses they did in the recent elections”.

That is the significance of the 65,000 and four seats won by Sinn Fein (Abstentionists on principle, Sinn Fein refuse to take the seats they won.) “Not so much an indication that the people back a policy of armed force against Ulster, but that they realise the importance of Partition in Irish life and are
willing to support those who keep the question alive”.

The main lesson of the recent election is, she thinks, “That people want a progressive policy and will vote for it when they find it”. The duty of the “labour movement” is to put forward a radical policy and “on it build a socialist party in the South of Ireland” (Emphasis added). Until that is done, no “progress” can be made solving the problem of partition or “the running sore of Irish life”, unemployment and emigration.

“The rank and file of the Labour Party must replace the present membership with men of more militant character and greater integrity.”

If Labour offers to the people a radical policy it can hope to build a strong, if not eventually an electoral and political govern- ment. It would “gather to itself the more socially and economically aware members of the present Sinn Fein and all those progressive independents who have come to the fore because of the failures of the Irish Labour Party to fulfill its historic duty...”

THE MYTHICAL “CASE AGAINST PARTITION”

This article accurately sums up the dominant attitudes on the populist-nationalist Left and the CP-influenced segments of the Labour Movement. Much of it is nonsensical. The “response” will generate in SR a fruitful discussion on Ireland.

That there has been a “carnival of reaction”, north and south, for more than three decades, is understatement rather than description. The partition boundary has separated Ireland into two economic centres in Britain. Neither Dublin nor Belfast were the centre of an inter-kin Irish economic entity. Both segments of Ireland relate to economic centres in Britain.

Mass emigration had been a giant feature of Irish life since 1922, but since the famine of the 1400s; and indeed there had been large-scale emigration long before that (And other large-scale famines). Not only is partition not explained, not mentioned, but the social and economic life of the Irish working class and its populist “left” variant by advocating a federal Ireland. It would take account of the distinct identity of the northern Protestants. But no trace of that idea remains in Socialist Review.

SOCIALIST REVIEW FINDS AN INTERPRETER-SPOKESMAN

Patricia Rushton has summed up the populist-left-nationalist version of middle class Catholic nationalism, and repeated the then common understanding of the issues. This has nothing to do with the “subtleties” of the new Socialist Review formula.

But SR now publishes a number of articles that will bring out some of the real complex of issues which constitutes the mid-20th century “Irish question”.

Rushton has not explored the meaning and implications of Socialist Review’s new-mined slogan. In the September 1957 SR an article by Owen Sheehy Skeffington: “What has happened to the Irish revolution?”

Owen Sheehy Skeffington is a humane, pacificist socialist, a representative of Trinity College Dublin in the Irish Senate. He has campaigned against such things as the comprehensively vicious corporal punishment and other ill-treatments routinely meted out to Irish school children, at a time when nobody else was doing it. Tony Cliff says in his reminiscences that when he lived in Dublin Owen Sheehy Skeffington’s family “adopted” the stranger, inviting him regularly to Sunday dinner.

Owen Sheehy Skeffington is the son of famous parents, Francis Skeffington and Hannah Sheehy. They were feminists — when they married each took the other’s name — pacifists and socialists, associates of Jim Larkin and James Connolly in the battles of Irish labour before 1914.

In campaigning for votes for women, the militant suffrage movement which they led had avoided the rupture with the Labour movement which made the militant suffrage movement a statistocratic both in outlook and in some of its work.

The assumption that Ireland was a “natural” economic entity disrupted by partition is pointedly not true: Ireland has never been divided by any lines, except the big industries in the north, which included what was then the largest shipyards in the world. Neither Dublin nor Belfast were the centre of an inter-kin Irish economic entity. Both segments of Ireland related to economic centres in Britain.

Patricia Rushton offered a seriously stupid piece of explana- tion away to account for the upsurge of nationalism in response to the battle of the North. Four million men were elected because people wanted to keep the issue of partition to the forefront — as if the Establishment did not “keep the issue alive”.

The main lesson of the recent election is, she thinks, “That people want a progressive policy and will vote for it when they find it”.

Sinn Fein has typically small-bourgeois politics and the ideal of a self-sufficient small-island peasant economy. The statement that they had a progressive policy is so sharply at odds with the reality that the reader is reduced to speculation: what can she have meant? Their opposition to Partition? That was common to all the southern parties. Their mili- tarily? If not that, what?

Now, there is at least a serious possibility that Catholic control, which stilled the 26 counties, would never have been as all-controlling as it in fact was, if one million Protestants had existed in the same state. But the Catholic church already had enormous power in Catholic Ireland. Protestant reaction to the power of the church in Catholic Ireland — expressed in the cry, “Home Rule means Rome Rule” — had been a major factor in mobilising mass opposition to Home Rule. (The fact that a large part of the 1915 Provisional Irish government was made up of Protestant southern MPs is one of the most intriguing facts of Irish history.)

The fact that the major Irish “Ulster” sees itself as British, as distinct from a national identity different from that of the Catholic-nationalist majority on the island, is ignored; and thus the solution is looked for to working class unity, which is equated with northern working class conversion to support for a united Ireland — that is, all-Irish working class unity is assumed to automatically produce acceptance by the Northern Irish working class and a federal and a representative government of the Catholic-nationalist workers. But it is only possible to make these assumptions by misrepresenting and misidentifying the dynamic causes of Partition and the depth of the community’s antagonism towards Partition.

The tiny Irish Trotskyist group, which included Matt Mer- rigan and after 1947 adhered to the “shachtmanite” Workers’ Party strand in Trotsky Trotskyism, has, in the period of Partition, broken some new ground. It has separated itself from middle-class nationalism and its populist “left” variant by advocating a federal Ireland. It would take account of the distinct identity of the northern Protestants. But no trace of that idea remains in Socialist Review.

Owen Sheehy Skeffington concludes: “When, then, will Ireland dare to awake and shake off her fears? Have we yet indeed, reached the point where an Irish newspaper will even print a question like this?”

This is good-hearted abstract socialist propaganda directed at the “general public” and at “Ireland”. Such socialist propaganda would have its place in the arsenal of a militant socialist movement that had other weapons in play as well, in the first place the class struggle of the proletariat. In essence it propounds a populist-nationalist version of socialism.

“The only isomorphism Connolly is an icon of the canon of Irish nationalism, sworn to by everyone. Skeffington is explicitly pessimistic about the Irish working class. The picture of the various Republican formations over the decades is a rhetorical device. They did know what they stood for socially — as his own recollection of the IRA protection landlords and others during the Anglo-Irish War aptly illustrates.

Wherever found Sheehy Skeffington’s article and reprinted it evidently wants this sort of “socialism is the only answer” exposition.

In the late 60s, this sort of abstract socialism will play a very bad role in disarming socialists and prepar- ing the rise of the Provisional IRA, which offered what came to be accepted as practice — immediate, anti-imperialist poli- cies. We will see what role the political descendants of that group played then.

SHEEHY SKEFFINGTON’S SECOND ARTICLE

The October 1957 SR carries a second article by Sheehy Skeffington: “Ireland: Socialist Policy versus the IRA”. This too rea- d as something intended for an Irish audience. It is an extremely important article for its approach to the residual na- tionalism which still exists in Ireland.

Sheehy Skeffington knows himself to represent a distinct, long- eclipsed strand in Irish politics.

Where Owen Sheehy Skeffington’s first article is vague, Ireland, she has, by the “wrong road” since 1922, when an Irish government recognised by the British was es- tablished. Ireland and the British government are in a conflict between that government and Republicans who refused to recognise the King of England as titular head of the Irish Free State. It will become clear that Sheehy Skeffington thinks that “the wrong road” stretches back not only to 1922 but to the 1916 Rising.

Why “wrong”? “The vast majority of Irish Republicans, past and present, had never and have never given a thought to the directly the social and economic content of their Repub- lican public would be for them. The Republic is a bright symbol entirely devoid of significant content.”

The war of independence was a huge, great, terrified, of facing the facts of social and economic life which produce “unem- ployment in the midst of work crying out to be done” and mass migration from Ireland.

All “our” efforts have been directed towards setting up and maintaining “a tuppenny-halfpenny, third-rate capitalist statelet” in which an Irish ruling class can buy “big American cars” while poor “faddy and bridget” are “free to continue as under-educated labourers and maids...” Our new Irish aris- tocrats of trade and politics have... far less social conscience than “many” of the old Anglo-Irish ruling class.

He quotes James Connolly in 1897: “Remove the English army tomorrow, and hoist the Green Flag...[and] unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic, your ef- forts will be in vain”. With an illustrative story he recalls that during the Irish War of Independence (1919-21) the IRA was used to protect the property of the rich against the poor.

Under a cross head, “No Solution Short of Socialism”, he goes on: “In Ireland there is no place for socialism and has never been since James Connolly was murdered “with the approval of a whole section of the Irish ruling class”. (Connolly, shot on 12 May 1916, was one of the last two of the 150 shot after the suppression of the Rising. An outcry against the killings was gathering force. Connolly was re- covering in jail from a badly wounded leg. For fear Connolly might escape with his life, the Irish Independent appeared with an editorial pointing out that some of the worst ring-leaders remained unpunished, side-by-side with a photo- graph of James Connolly).”

Governments of the independent Irish state, and the phys- ical-force Republicans, abstaining from politics, have both failed utterly.

Nothing will be right until “we... plan our whole economy” to produce for need.

Sheehy Skeffington concludes: “When, then, will Ireland dare to awake and shake off her fears? Have we yet indeed, reached the point where an Irish newspaper will even print a question like this?”

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this is sharp and hard. He cuts through the prevailing form of mystifying Catholic middle-class nationalist cant about Partition. He defines the situation in Northern Ireland concretely and in the light of the principle of self-determination. And Tyne is never to be disjointed from the rest of Ireland, and have ever since consistently ‘opted out’ in the only constitutional manner open to them — by voting nationalist — the term ‘occupied’ counties might with justice be applied to them, but not to the other four counties, taken either singly or collectively.”

Measuring in existing counties does not adequately address the complex demography of the Six Counties, but in principle this is the whole issue, the modern “Irish question”, in a nutshell.

I need to digress to explain.

The fundamental fact is the existence of an Irish Protestant-Unionist minority, identifying themselves as British, who are the compact minority in north-east Ulster. The problem with Federation is that it does not clearly, or as clearly as the intermingling of Catholic-nationalists and Protestant-Unionists would allow, divide the peoples who proclaim conflicting national identities, Irish and British. It impresses in the Protestant-Unionists strong their desire to restrict the Catholic nationalist population who are (in 1957) at least one in three of the 6-County population, and the majority in not much less than half the land are of the 6-County state. They are a majority not only in Fermaghn and Tyrone, but also, for example, in the second city of Northern Ireland, Derry, a mere two miles inside the 6 county border though in a predominantly Protestant-Unionist county.

Partition created a second Irish minority, the Catholic nationalists within the 6-County “Protestant” state. They are a bigger proportion of the 6-County population than the Protestant-Unionists would have been in a 32-County Ireland. This artificial second minority burns with a sense of British imperialist-imposed injustice and experiences daily discrimination and second-class citizenship at the hands of an insecure and fear-ridden Northern Ireland majority.

If it were not for this very large imprisoned Catholic minority, growing faster than the Protestant-Unionists, the 6-County state developed as an unstable quasi-police state for the minority and a place of uneasy dominance for its majority.

To return to Skeffington — he concludes that: “Consequently, the people of the partition should be directed on both sides of the Border, towards concerted action to better the living conditions of all our people.” Southern anti-Partitionists should study what it has been possible to do in the Welfare State which the reforming Labour Government has much to produce. And self-sacrifice of those young men who are now being organised for glamorous military adventures in the social field in the 6-Counties, and to decide what exactly would be the social content of the all-Ireland Republic of their dreams.

This is a slightly bashful attempt to argue for “socialism” from the Welfare State which the reforming Labour Government of 1945 had brought to the Six Counties as part of the UK.

Skeffington quotes James Connolly in 1901: “Ireland as distinct from her people is nothing to me.”

He urges those who think as he does to “use their influence to turn the very real spirit of self-sacrifice of those young men who are now being organised for glamorous military forays — including murder if things go wrong — towards less glamorous”, but more constructive activities.

Some in Ireland glorify “the military method” and are not afraid of “another civil war”; “The military method is conventionally held to be a glorious one; and in some Irish circles today the prospect of another civil war is being received with starters of excitement — partly because of exaggerated and unthinking anti-Partitionist propaganda...” And also because of a sense of failure... to “apply the high principles of the IRA’s way”...

Lavin, a veteran of many decades in the labour movement, is, if I understand it, an O’Leherite, a sort of ultra-sectarian and ultra left “Trotskyist”, a Catholic and fervent Irish nationalist. For all that, he is a sharp-witted man who knows where to hit his opponents. His attitudes and politics anticipate the pro-IRA British left of the 70s.

Sheeby Skeffington has made a “cowardly attack on the Irish resistance movement”; his article “could have been written by an official agent of the British government”. The IRA is “not produced” by Ireland but by the British government: “As long as there is a British Army in Ireland, the IRA will be there too.”

Lavin insists on being fair to Adolf Hitler. It is “British jingo programme to blame Hitler and not imperialist rivalry for the Second World War. It is a too ‘easy assumption’ that Nazism is something more evil than capitalism.” The vehement 1840s radical nationalist, Finnan Lalor, was right: “Deliverance or death — deliverance, or this island a desert.”

Sheeby Skeffington would have had “short shrift” had he demanded of the French anti-German Resistance that they had to produce a blueprint for a new France! The partition of Ireland was imposed by force, under Prime Minister Lloyd George’s threat to the Irish negotiators of “war without stint” as the alternative.

The IRA should seek “the good will of world opinion”? The “Hun-like anti-imperialist of the Irish republic, the Irish republicans!” had it a year ago, “and much good it did them!” The IRA are “murderers”! Dr Fogarty, the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe, has written: “When the young men of Ireland hit back at their oppressors it is not for an old man like me to cry foul!”

Thisarchive reference sums up Lavin’s position more clearly than he may have understood. Michael Fogarty supported the Republic’s forces in the war of independence; was vehemently on the anti-Republic side in the civil war; and was an outspoken clerical-fascist Blueshirt bishop in the mid-30s. He sat on the Blueshirts’ platforms at public meeting in Ennis.

Lavin sums up the militant version of the politics Patricia Rushton has already presented in Socialist Review. The Belfast Government represents “a quiescing minority with the mentality of... the backwoodsmen of Arkansas who [believe in] life, liberty and the pursuit of negorses.”

The Dublin politicians should be held in detestation by opponents of the Belfast “quiescing” regime. “They have done little or nothing to reunite their country or to endeavour to have it take its old and rightful place amongst the nations of the earth.”

He concludes: “Partition has inflicted well-nigh irreparable injury upon the country”; and “Without the backing of the British forces there could be no partition of Ireland.”

The editors have put a cross-head in Lavin’s piece: “Neither Stormont nor Dublin” — echoing their own “Neither Washington nor Moscow”. In the Irish context, it evokes the “abstentionist” Republicans rejection of the two “Partitionist parliaments” in Belfast and Dublin!

An editorial reply in the same paper takes Lavin to task for saying the title had been “Ireland versus the IRA” when it had been “Socialist Policy Versus the IRA”. More dubiously, and very oddly indeed: “Sheeby Skeffington did not hold Hitler responsible for World War Two but explicitly stated that British and French policies after 1918 did much to produce Nazism.” Sheeby Skeffington’s point was that though Britain and France had done much to produce Nazism, one could not therefore endorse Hitler’s war-making. Why is SR so defensive?

If as [Lavin] suggests the IRA’s way is, and should be, Ireland’s way, why do they not, why does he not, show us where that way is leading? Why violence if it leads nowhere? If it leads, it hindered us from getting anywhere.

This ends the first discussion in Socialist Review. The commitment to “The reunification of an independent Ireland” remains in the programme printed in each issue.
The second discussion on Ireland, 1958

In the first, October 1958, issue of the now fortnightly Socialist Review, a new round of discussion is launched:

“From Northern Ireland, George Adair writes on the need for a United Irish Republic.” This is an attempt to defend Socialist Review’s point of view, and George Adair is most likely a pen name.

A nervous introduction by the editor (Michael Kidron) explains what SR think they are doing:

“SR stands for the unification of an independent Ireland. The following article from a correspondent in Northern Ireland shows something of the history of this demand in the socialist movement, the tragedy that has befallen it and how the future of the demand is tied up with the growth of a healthy, non-sectarian Labour movement in that country — Editor.”

The first wave of intense IRA activity on the border has now thinned-out to an occasional raid. The Connolly Association and the Communist Party network in the Labour movement are starting a vigorous campaign on the “Mallon and Talbot case.” These two republicans are charged with murdering a policeman, Sergeant Owens, by booby-trap bomb. The Communist Party has sent one of its lawyer members, John Keating, to check on the trial and write a pamphlet arguing that the two republicans, who might have faced the death penalty, are victims of a police frame up.

It was an early example of propaganda against the Six County state focusing up front on the real ill-treatment of the Catholic minority and their lack of certain civil rights, and used as an argument for the abolition of the Six County entity. This approach will in a decade mobilise a mass Catholic revolt, bring great international odium on the Six County sub-state, then lead to the IRA war and the abolition of the Belfast Protestant-Unionist government early in 1972.

Adair: “As bombs explode along the border the chance of Ireland ever reaching peace and unity appear to become more remote…” The IRA and the splinter group, Saor Uladh [Free Ulster] are trying “to cause such civil havoc and condemnation to bring the Irish problem to the forefront of world politics.”

In the Socialist Review discussion?

“Socialist Review drops a slogan

We come now to the final chapter in this story, Socialist Review’s view of the new “discussion” article accompanying SR’s editorial explanation of the change of line is too quirky to be anything other than the work of a real person, as distinct from a name of convenience assumed by one of SR’s inner core. Yet it is Harris who presents their alternative to the slogan they have dropped.

Harris explains what SR’s change of line is designed to combat: “The passing of resolutions calling for the ‘withdrawal of British troops from Ireland’, ‘Self-Determination for Ireland’, or some similar objective has become common practice among British trade union and Labour Party branches, and other socialist organisations and groups.”

Those who vote for such things are “on the whole” “well-meaning socialists” but their attention is “usually drawn to the position of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland by Irish exiles who have been, unfortunately, blinded to facts by virtue of having been engaged with a fierce nationalism which has been deliberately confused with religious bigotry by years of clerical indoctrination.”

We have seen that Socialist Review has so far seemed to accept the fundamental case from this point of view. On leaving SR, Harris now appeals to "all Irishmen" to face the "bitter" facts.

He agrees that: “The ‘state’ of Northern Ireland was founded undemocratically and by a Tory confidence trick...”

This may be unique in the history of the SR-Ins-WP tendency for the attempt to explain what they are doing. But it is also typical: they “open” a “discussion” by first changing the line, that is, adopting a new line, albeit a negative one! It is also not always a policy of the SR-Ins-WP to have admitted that there were disagreements amongst Irish socialists.

Why are they changing again? They must be uneasy about the position they have taken up to satisfy the new people in Nottingham. The IRA campaign, though it still twitches now and then in the form of isolated incidents, and will briefly flare up again in 1961, is by now a spent force. The Communist Party and the Connolly Association continue the war by political means, in the form of a political campaign in the British labour movement against the “Northern Ireland police” and in the Labour Party, they have made much political mileage with their campaign on behalf of the two IRA prisoners allegedly tortured into confessing to the killing of a police officer.

Something else is moving on the left too. The main Trotskyist organisation, the Healy group, has begun to break new ground on the Irish question. In the early 50s their paper Socialist Outlook has carried routine middle-class nationalist accounts of Ireland.

But now, since 1957, they have recruited a number of Irish militant building workers of the Communist Party. The most important of them is Brian Behan, a member of the Communist Party Executive Committee.

Behan has long objected to the non-socialist character of the Communist Party’s Irish work, and to the pseudo-nationalism purveyed by the Connolly Association. So have a number of other Irish members or supporters of the Communist Party.

Under their influence the Healy group’s paper Newsletter reports Ireland in terms of the class struggle. They report on the doings of socialists such as the one-time Health Minister Noel Browne. Then reported on the 26 Counties in terms of class and working-class experience.

They have a solid influence for a while among militant Irish building workers in London.

As a rule the Socialist Review Group tends to follow the lead of the Healyites. Against nuclear weapons, for example, they copy the Healyite slogan “Black the Bomb and the Bases”. (“Black” means boycott, ban, “hot-cargo”)

The Healyites’ new approach will have exerted some pressure on the Socialist Review Group.
Trotskysts debate Ireland

in, roughly, the four counties around Belfast, who do not want independence under a Dublin – and as they believe, Catholic – government.

By “confidence trick” Harris seems to mean the fomenting of religious divisions. He is, of course, right. But his definition is so vague as to leave the impression that he is not denying that “the confidence trick was highly effective and that Northern Ireland was established as ‘an integral part of the United Kingdom’ with the almost complete support of the people living within its boundaries.” They “still support the continuance of the state of Northern Ireland”. To ignore this “would be comparable with the US’s policy with the[theStalinist] People’s Republic of China” (refusal to recognise).

The level of ignorance or clumsy mendacity involved in the claim that the Six County state has had and has the support of almost all its people, that the confidence trick is, is only in extreme expression on the general ignorance of this spokesman for Socialist Review. Skelton in his recent book has already discussed the religious-political composition of the peoples of the six counties. Hasn’t Harris read Skelton’s article? Haven’t the editors of Socialist review? And where was Cliff, one-time resident in Ireland?

Under the cross-head, “Divide and rule”. Harris writes that the “confidence trick” is to divide and rule on the basis of religious differences, like India, Palestine and Cyprus.

Suspicion and antagonism are engendered by granting small favours and rights to the minority group – in the Irish case the Protestants – at the expense of the majority, the Roman Catholics.

In this way the heroic struggle of the Irish peasants for basic human rights and dignities degenerated into a struggle between the lackeys of British Imperialism and the agents of the Irish bourgeoisie and aristocracy, and rival churches.

In this gradual change of direction of the Irish struggle, great socialists like Fintan Lalor and James Connolly were used and cruelly betrayed. The very mention of their names has become almost heresy in the South and the people in the North are almost totally ignorant of them.

Harris has a vague notion of history as a conspiracy produced through manipulation by an all-powerful ruling class. His ignorance of what he writes about is, repeat, astonishing. So is that of the editors of Socialist Review.

For instance, Fintan Lalor was not a socialist. Harris is all handed-down, garbled, pseudo-understanding. Essentially he doesn’t know what he is talking about. Not even when what he’s saying has some sense to it, as with the following: “Many believe that socialism can never be achieved in a divided country... This... is true up to a point, but it is sheer fancy, indeed folly, to contend, as they do that territorial unity... This is true up to a point, but it is sheer fantasy, indeed folly, to contend, as they do that territorial unity...”

“Many believe that socialism can never be achieved in a divided country. This... is true up to a point, but it is sheer fancy, indeed folly, to contend, as they do that territorial unity... This... is true up to a point, but it is sheer fantasy, indeed folly, to contend, as they do that territorial unity...”

Harris concludes: “Only by a policy of separately establishing socialism, North and South, and exposing both ‘Orange’ and ‘green’ Tories will Ireland ever be ‘a nation once again’.”

Here Harris, and SR, whose spokesperson on this issue he evidently is, neatly invert the Stalinist scheme of “first national liberation and unity, then socialism”. Now it is socialism, in fact two socialisms, and then Irish unity. Their version is upside down, like a tree with its roots in the air.

This is a strange hodge-podge of middle-class nationalistic history, half-formulated important truths — the split Irish bourgeoisie — and would-be cunning schemes. History is a playing of bourgeois manipulators. He has no idea of such things as the autonomy of culture, including religion, as factors in history. He more or less fades out of his picture the aspect of Partition which will dominate Irish politics for the next half-century, the Northern Ireland Catholic people. He makes little reference to Northern Ireland realities — other than to assume that the welfare state has united the population of Northern Ireland in support of Partition.

Harris, like Skelton, has provided soft targets for the redoubtable militant representative of Irish Catholic nationalism in these discussions, Lavin.

DOMINIC BEHAN

SR’s paper is running out of steam and, having become a fortnightly at the start of 1958, is about to revert to monthly publication. There is no new issue of SR until Easter 1959, when SR publishes a rebuttal of Noel Harris by Dominic Behan.

Dominic Behan is a brother of the famous folk-singer and actor, and the ex-CP building-trades militant who is chairman of the Healyite Socialist Labour League, and of the playwright Brendan Behan. The brothers come from a Stalinist-Republican family in Dublin.

Dominic is becoming well known as a folk singer. He is the author of two ballads about two IRA martyrs in the Border Campaign, killed on a border raid on New Year’s Day, 1957, both of which had gained tremendous popularity in Ireland.

One is a rollicking, mindless piece of militarist vain-glory, celebrating one of the IRA’s clerical fascists, Sean Sabh [John South] of Carrigowen. The other, The Patriot Game, is a thoughtless and truthless examination of the IRA outlook, put in the mouth of the 17-year-old, Fergal O’Hanlon.

Behan’s arguments provide a valuable snapshot of the mind of an Irish Socialist Republican of that time.

Behan, quoting Sam Goldwyn, finds Noel Harris’ piece “filled with clichés, and not one of them new”. No one except the IRA is “carrying on any struggle against the forces of occupation, North or South of the Border; political or purely physical force.”

He admits he is what Harris “and the Daily Mail would dub a petty-bourgeois terrorist; and for all that I’m a socialist!...”

Before “criticising the young men who had taken up arms against John Bull”, we should examine the conditions that gave rise to the IRA. For nearly 800 years, “not a single decade went by but Irishmen asserted in blood their unquenchable right to independence and self-determination.”

The Fenians (of the 1860s) “played more than a small part in founding the great British Chartist movement” (of the 1840s). James Connolly and Liam Mellows were socialists and Republicans. In 1936 Frank Ryan — “did you ever of him?” — led en to fight Franco who came from the organisation “of petty-bourgeois terrorists”.

The Irish Republican Army policy is (he emphasises, in capitals) “for national independence and an end to occupation, either British or American”.

Behan denies Andy Boyd (of the Communist Party in Northern Ireland, who will in 1969 be the correspondent there of the influential left-Labour weekly Tribune) Boyd has not mentioned Partition in his recent election address.

“Without British military occupation” of Ireland... the socialist movement “would have developed as it would in lands where no national problem exists...”

Behan asks: how can the “ground be made ready for a really progressive struggle?” The workers of Ireland “should be asked” to support the self-determination demand of the Republicans”. Causes of poverty “directly attributable to the economic partition of the country should be correctly attributed...”

“The labour movement in Britain must be made to demand that not one penny of the British taxpayers’ money must now be spent on bolstering a littering Empire’s lackeys’ institutions in Ireland against the expressed wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people”.

He finishes: “The Partition of Ireland is wrong! The occupation of any part of Ireland by a foreign army is wrong! Two separate’ socialisms is a false, dangerous argument... des- signed by jingoists to betray the Irish Workers’ Republic. The only truly progressive slogan for us can be Unity and Social-ism. Get to hell out of here, John Bull and let us clear up the mess ourselves.”

Behan’s article is a valuable picture of the Irish Stalinist-socialist republican mindset at that time. His account of Irish — and English — labour movement history is pure moon- shine. So is his stuff about the Irish separatists rising in every decade of 800 years of history.

He is critical of the Irish Stalinists in the North for not campaigning against Partition, as the separately organised Stalinists do in the South and in Britain. But he is saturated with the CP-honed view of the “Irish problem” and of Irish history.

Of course he is right about the idea of two Irish socialisms.
Trotskists debate Ireland

The 1968-9 discussion in IS (SWP) and its consequences

At the start of the Northern Ireland crisis in 1968, the domi-
nation of the workplace by the British left was essen-
tially that of middle-class Irish nationalism.

The partition of Ireland was a brutal British imperialist im-
position on Ireland; it was contrary to democracy and the
rights of the Irish majority; and it created Protestant-Catholic
division where otherwise there would be none or little.

By the late 1960s, Stalinists, some of them trained by the
Connolly Association, and notably Dr Roy Johnstone, had ef-
fectively gained control of what there was of the IRA. The
Socialist Review group had small public presence and no in-
fluence on events either in Ireland or in the British labour
movement.

The discussion within IS (SWP) in 1969 would have conse-
quences in the world outside IS – great consequences.

INFLUENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The organisation now had an important influence in Nort-
thern Ireland. Where a group of IS co-thinkers played an im-
portant role in the agitation that would lead to its collapse into
the first stage of civil war in August 1969 – and, then, for 38
years, to the British Army taking on the role of sacking to sup-
port the Northern Ireland sub-state, while Britain at-
tempo-re-modeled it.

The group which published Socialist Worker, IS (today
SWP), was then the lively element in Britain's activist's
world. That is why Dominic Behan has picked it up.

Lavin

In Socialist Review of 1 March 1959, Patrick Lavin has the
last word:

“I note that you have dropped from your programme the
idea of an independent and united Ireland. I had thought
that your attitude on this question was the outcome of an im-
portant consideration of the facts of the case. However, it
now appears that I was mistaken. It would seem that you have al-
terred your programme because some pseudo-socialists in Ire-
land are unclear on the issue. This seems to me to be a peril-
ously near approach to the attitude of the legendary
Yankee politician who assured his hearers that ‘They’re my
sentiments, and if you don’t like them they can be
left alone.’

Lavin hits at Noel Harris's inconsistency in not draw-
ing the ardour of the British Communist Party's Irish front
organisation's most prominent intellectual. He sim-
ples their ardour for political independence (which is true).

He has also said that Northern Ireland was established with the "almost complete sup-
pression of the political aspirations of the Catholic minor-
ity in Ireland."

Harris himself has said that Northern Ireland was set up by a Tory "confidence trick." The nationalists at that time
were the majority in Armaugh, Fermanagh, Tyrone, south
County Down, and Derby [City]. Only in Antrim and North
County Down were the "Tories" in a majority. There were
93,000 Catholics in Belfast.

Lavin's wrap-around talk of "the majority" obscures the
existence of a compact minority in north-east Ulster.

And he avoids the question of the overall population ratio
in the 6 Counties. In fact he falsifies it and spins a fairytale.
The ratio is two to one in favour of the Protestant-Unionists.

Lavin: "Because the fraud by which Northern Ireland was
established was successful, Mr Harris thinks that the bastard
legislature at Stormont is right to exist. Is not this the old
abominable doctrine that the end justifies the means, which,
universally acted upon, would drive the very idea of decency
from the minds of men?"

The Stormont gang, "and their pitiful dupes" are obsessed
by an ignorant hatred of the Catholic Church, a hatred “hard
distinguish from insanity.” Lavin ends by asking: "why
only the Irish, of all the peoples struggling to be free, should be
forced to postpone their national liberation till a socialist so-
ciety has been established?"

Lavin, who is, seems both a Catholic and a long-time
revolutionary socialist, in a pure voice of the strange fusion
of "Communism" and Catholic Irish nationalism that still,
now, even more, than half a century later, dominates on the
Irish, British and international left.

BEHAN

Behan's third slogan-demand, "withdraw subsidies", also
comes from the Stalinists (1955). What does it mean, one
"demanded" of the British government here in relation to “British Occupied Ireland”?

It that stop subsidising the social services, the dole in the
mainly Catholic areas of high unemployment, the NHS, and
an education system vastly inferior to that in the South.

That is, to savagely reduce the living standards of the
people of Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant. That is,
to expel the whole of the Six Counties working class from the
territorial gains of the British labour movement in the post-
World-War-Two Welfare State.

It is a demand to do to Northern Ireland what Thatcher
will do to Britain 20 years later, only vastly more so.

Did anything so bizarre ever appear in the pages of an hon-
est socialist newspaper – even as discussion? It rivals the
German Stalinist "After Hitler, our turn next".

Where does the demand originate? It might possibly come
from some Southern bourgeois whose brain had been pickled
in Catholic chauvinism for too long, or who had been in a lu-
natic asylum since 1921, if you could find one! Its honest
meaning would be the cry: ‘Stop corrupting our workers’
— a sort of addled-pated nationalist "ultra-leftism."

In fact it comes from pseudo-Irish nationalists, eager to dis-
place their ardour for political independence (which is true),
which they wish to serve some other goal, people con-
cerned almost entirely with something other than Ireland,
her peoples or her working class. That is where Dominic
Behan has picked it up.

It originated with the British Communist Party's Irish front
organisation, the Connolly Association (in 1955). Note it well,
reader. You will encounter it again in an unexpected place, in
the form of the demand to “End British Subsidies”.

MILITANCY THE CENTRAL VALUE

All of the IS of 1968 was there. There had been a strong
strain of quasi-anarchists in IS's youth segment. Direct ac-
tion, "do-it-yourself" reforms, and "militancy" were the cen-
tral values. Alongside the quasi-anarchism in Foot's article, and of IS's
normal approach there, was the right from the start, a lack of awareness of, or a refusal to notice, central features of the
reality of Northern Ireland.

In Foot's article the idea that "the people in revolt" were only
(a section of) the Catholic minority was resolutely
pushed aside. He depicted a worker and student uprising against the Northern Ireland equivalent of a Greek military dictator or a white supremacist in Africa.

This was a view of Northern Ireland seen through spectacles that filtered out what was specific to Northern Ireland. For the next year, anyone relying only on Socialist Worker for information about Northern Ireland would not have been able to make sense of events there. The national, communal, denominational, sectarian realities of the real Northern Ireland were not admitted into the pages of Socialist Worker until August 1969, when panic led the IS leaders to face realities (sort of), and to abandon their fantasies.

The first serious discussion of Ireland and the organisation’s turn to Irish work took place at the Executive Committee on 12 December 1968.

The muddle and confusion that characterised IS in 1968 was thick and dense at the very beginning of the discussion on Ireland. Gery Lawless was invited to attend. He was a fringe journalist and “professional Irishman” in the London and British left, a self-righteous Irish chauvinist who liked to denounce the British labour movement either for not being sufficiently active on the “Irish question,” or for “telling Irish people what to do,” that is, holding political opinions on Ireland independent of his own politics, especially in Northern Ireland.

Lawless — putting a line agreed on with IS’s “Irish experts,” Tony Cliff and John Palmer — gave the “keynote speech.” The minutes of the meeting state:

“Comrade L felt that the British working class had a racialist, chauvinist attitude towards the Irish question. The British left was not very much better informed. IS should educate its own members, and do something about the muddle and confusion that characterised IS in 1968.

“If IS is serious, it should not simply organise demonstration on Ireland but try to educate the working class (and IS members) to campaign and organise on the Irish question (remember there are over a million Irishmen in this country, mostly workers). There was perhaps scope for a campaign on Vietnam Solidarity Campaign lines which should be more fruitful because it could bring workers into contact with the revolutionary left. The campaign should take in questions coming from the south as well, although main emphasis on the North.”

The committee duly agreed:

(a) To educate the group (and the British left, especially revolutionary Marxists)

(b) Start an Irish campaign

(c) Assist the re-formation of an Irish group.

The scene at this meeting, with the professional Irishman Gery Lawless telling off the committee and denouncing the British working class for being racists and chauvinists on Ireland, was very like a once well-known cartoon by Jules Feiffer on Vietnam Solidarity Campaign lines which should be more fruitful because it could bring workers into contact with the revolutionary left. The campaign should take in questions coming from the south as well, although main emphasis on the North.”

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the mid-Ulster constituency. She was called the “unity” candidate; but really, and although she proclaimed herself a social-  

ist, that referred to Catholic unity within the constituency.

In London she worked with IS, holding meetings on building sites and in some working-class areas. In May IS set up a from-organisation, the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign. Mysteriously, given the decisions in January, the campaign’s platform included a call for a workers’ republic and did not include a call for withdrawing British subsidies. IS never attempted to make an in-depth analysis of North-ern Ireland or Ireland as a whole. Decades later, writing to Jim Higgins, who was working on a history of the organisa- 

tion, John Palmer, one of the authors of the “centralised” chaos in the organisation’s Irish work in 1969, admitted that the organisation never had worked out a coherent line on Ire-land. We told him and the others that often enough back in 1969.

IS’s line was shaped by organisational considerations and the desire to “second” People’s Democracy and keep in with its leaders. In fact, the IRSC was in its politics not seriously different from the Communist Party front, the Connolly Asso-ciation. The main difference was in that one organisation fronted for the Communist Party and the other for IS.

**SPURIOUS “GOOD REASONS” FOR “TROOPS OUT”, AND THEN COLLAPSE INTO EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR TROOPS**

In May, there was a front-page of Socialist Worker with a raucous call for troops out. Why was IS for troops out? Be-cause, said Socialist Worker, the only role the British Army could play in Northern Ireland was to back up the sectarian Six County state. That was obviously absurd. One of the things that had destabilised Northern Ireland was the pressure from the Labour government elected in October 1964 to reform the Orange-sectorial characteristics of the sub-state. Some Labour politicians who saw the potential for prime minister Harold Wilson or even in the government had campaigned against the Northern Ireland regime, sometimes with the Connolly Asso-ciation. One of them, Paul Rose, a future judge, had pub-lished a pamphlet about the Manchester Martyrs. They wanted to turn Northern Ireland into an ordinary West European liberal state – to graft normal bourgeois dem-oocratic practices on to the sectarian structures on which the sub-state rested. This was like trying to graft the head of a human being on to the body of a dog; it could not work. Even today the northern Irish sub-state rests on an intricate bu-reaucratised system of sectarian balances; it is more or less at peace for now, but it is probably not stable in the longer term. As an appreciation of modern Irish reality, IS’s explanation of why it was for troops out, and not for the demand of the Labour parliamentary left to dismantle Belfast home rule in the Six Counties and impose direct rule from London, was, to put it bluntly, deeply foolish. It was an example of IS leaders using whatever “good rea-sons” or “good arguments” they could find for their imme-diately, politically-organisationally defined, objective, and never mind the underlying implications.

In August 1969 the British Army would go on to the streets of Northern Ireland (to the cheering of the Northern Ireland Catholics) to stop sectarian civil war, and the British government would push aside the Belfast government. It didn’t abolish it yet, but it appointed British civil servants to shadow their northern Irish equivalents from 1969 until March 1972, when the Belfast government was abolished. Yes, indeed, the British Army shored up the six county state – but only to begin to dismantle its regime.

The IS leaders’ foolish assertion that the only conceivable role the British Army could play in Northern Ireland was to back up the Unionist sectarian state prepared them, in their panic at the beginning of the breakdown of the Six County state in August 1969, and their disorientation about the role the Army was obviously playing then, to turn themselves inside-out. In terms of political appreciation of reality they had been standing on their heads: now suddenly they flipped onto their feet. They effectively endorsed the British Army intervention, while栽他们自己毕竟担心他们的队伍是“不天使”和要做对人类的大事长-term.

There was continuity, however. They followed PD. The leader of PD, Michael Farrell, publicly called for the British Army to be sent in on the first day of the sectarian fighting in August 1969. Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin were slower about it, but they too called for the British Army to be deployed. They took public responsibility for the Army and talked up its benign role in northern Ireland. So did IS in Socialist Worker. Suddenly the people who had irrationally headlined “troops out” in May (when the troops were not intervening) dropped all their previous arguments when the troops did intervene.

The problem was not just the upturning by reality of the nonsense reason they had given for demanding troops out. It was also the logic of what PD had been doing “on the ground” in Northern Ireland.

The Six County state existed. It had the militant support of the majority of its citizens. So had its Unionist government. Its supporters were the compact majority in most of the ter-ritory of the Six County state. In part the sub-state was desta-bilised in face of British pressure for reform and Catholic agitation within its borders because of the political ineptitude of its political leaders and the effective demagoguery of their sectarian Unionist opponents, such as Ian Paisley, who led a revolt of working-class Protestant unionists against the Or-ange-Unionist political elite.

There was opposition to the “liberal” Unionists like Ter-ence O’Neill (then Northern Ireland prime minister) within the Unionist party from men like William Craig.

**LIBERAL UNIONISTS THE “MAIN ENEMY”?**

Traditionalism civil rights agitators backed the more liberal Unionists. PD proclaimed the liberal Unionists the main enemy.

Eamonn McCann compared the liberal Unionists to oppo-pressors wearing slippers and the hardliners to oppressors wearing hobnail boots. This became a very common metaphor with people like Bernadette Devlin. They drew the bizarre political conclusion that there was no substantial difference, since both were Unionists! All pro- 

sumptions guarded, it was a little like the attitude of the Stal- 

inists to the Nazis and Social Democrats in Germany before Hitler came to power.

Ian Paisley publicly claimed that Bernadette Devlin had turned up at his doorstep to propose a united front with him and his working-class supporters against the liberal Unionist government leaders. She did not deny this bit of crank ultra- 

left absurdity. Nor did her PD, or IS, collaborators dissociate themselves from her action.

The IS leaders did nothing to re-educate the PD leaders. It was not necessary to follow the mainstream Civil Rights leaders in giving political support and credence to the liberal Unionists, or to take responsibility for what they did and did not do. It was however necessary to recognise political and social reality – and to understand the balance of forces in Northern Ireland. If the “liberal unionist” were not to prevail then the extreme sectarian would. That would be a step to-wards civil war. (But then some of the PD people – Cyril Toman, for instance – had openly proclaimed the slogan “civil rights or civil war.”)

It was the provocative and too-often misguided “mili-tancy” of PD that distinguished them from the mainstream Civil Rights movement, not their operational politics.

PD’s course could logically lead to one of two conclusions. Either sectarian civil war, out of which, after invasion by the Southern army and/or Britain, would come repartition and the hiving-off of the Catholic majority areas along the bor-

der. Or: intervention by the British state to smother civil war before it properly got going.

Everything before the August explosion suggested that the outcome of breakdown would be British intervention rather than 26-county state intervention and repartition. And so it was. The Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, made a speech saying the 26 county government would not indefinitely “stand idly by” in face of what was happening in Northern Ireland. But he did.

There was widespread identification in Northern Ireland among Catholics with the US civil rights movement of black people (though in fact the levels of oppression were not really comparable). The PD leaders were also influenced by the experience of the American movement.

In the USA, however, the civil rights marches in white supremacist areas, the sit downs against segregation and the challenges to the dominant racists, made sense only on the assumption that there was a higher authority that could and would “intervene”. Michael Farrell’s very quick call on the British government – not the 26 county government, to which nationalist politicians such Eddie McAteer appeared for pro- 
tection – to send troops in August may indicate that all along he saw Northern Ireland, too, in terms of prodding a higher authority (from London) to intervene.

In any case Farrell, McCann and Devlin were followed im-mEDIATELY by IS. Effectively they had moved onto the ground of the Labour parliamentary left which demanded London direct rule as the alternative to majority rule – that is Protestant rule – in the sectarian Unionist six county state. The Trotskyist Tendency had criticised the “provocative” activities of PD and asked what the political perspective could be within the Six County state from such stoking-the-fire activities.

The whole logic of what PD had done and IS backed and lauded had to be, if not sectarian civil war, then British di-

direct rule. That logic crashed into place in August 1969 and afterwards.

In face of the erupting Catholic-Protestant civil war, IS buckled politically. IS “woke up” in August 1969 and discov-ered that, after all, there were for the British state in Northern Ireland and, without saying so, for direct rule. The political collapse provoked a crisis in IS.

“Groups which begin a struggle without a definite pro-gramme have been characterised as political bandits... The Love- 

stoneites,  wrote American Trotskyist James P Cannon of a socialist group in the 1930s with many of the same traits as IS/SWP, “were able and talented people, but they had no de-finite principles...”

“Theyir politics was always determined for them by external pressure. The Lovestoneites never had any independent pro-

gram of their own. They were never able to develop one”. --

20 Workers’ Liberty

Trotskyists debate Ireland
The gist of the 1969 “Troops Out” dispute

2. The aim is education

Marks on behalf of the EC made the following case: In the long term the troops and the Paisleyites serve the same interests; in the short term they are in contradiction with each other, which could be exploited by socialists to avoid the losses and blows which might have been dealt the Catholics and its leaders had the clash — between Stormont and its helpers, and the Catholics — been allowed to take its course without British intervention. The troops hid the effect of “freezing” the conflict, “buying time”, providing a “breathing space” for the Catholics. Self-defence was not being abandoned, merely “postponed” while arming would take place. The contradiction between the troops and the Paisleyites was immediately the main contradiction — the contradiction between the troops (and the state and ruling class they represented) and the barricades and workers’ self-defence would only become acute “at some future turn”. Therefore in the “short term” the troops should stay, but in the long run they should go.

To fit this, a formula was worked out whereby in slogans and headlines the troops shouldn’t be mentioned, but in the text we should “warn” about their future role. In subsequent arguments the headlines and slogans were labelled “agitation”, the small type was the “propaganda”. We were told that one must “understand the difference between propaganda and agitation”.

Underlying these arguments... was an absolute lack of clarity on the basic question. Why do we make demands? What are they for? Who are they addressed to? Throughout the discussions on the troops, the political effects (as opposed to the alleged physical effects) on the people of Belfast and Derry of either having or not having the “Withdraw Troops” demand was never considered. The role of demands of agitation and propaganda, in raising and developing consciousness and self-confidence among the workers, never came into it. The only people we were talking to, according to the conceptions of Marks and the EC, were the British authorities.

Unless we have a clear conception that the reason for putting demands, for making agitation and propaganda, is directly to try to raise the level of consciousness, to show the necessary direction of the struggle, to sharpen that struggle so that the masses, or at least those of the vanguard that we reach, learn the best political lessons from it, we are ham-strung from the start, we could drown down to a reformist conception — to a stance of petitioning the powers that be, looking to their actions and decisions for alleviation, rather than to the direct action of the working class. If that were the case, we would never make a demand that wasn’t likely to be realised immediately.

Moreover, if we do not see the various forms of “communication” (demands, slogans, agitation, propaganda, headlines and small print) as necessarily bound together by a single aim and programme, with the single purpose of raising consciousness (whether this be “purely” literary or whether it be linked with immediate action) then what is there to link them, to prevent them flying apart into contradictions and inconsistencies?

HOW MARTYNOV, HAVING RENDERED PLEKHANOV MORE PROFOUN D, WAS REBORN IN I.S.

For revolutionaries, there can be no contradiction between the content of agitation, propaganda and theory. The difference is not a question of the method of expressing the content. The content and meaning does not differ according to whether action might or might not follow, or whether that action might be on a mass scale or on a tiny scale. This is the essential meaning of the well known definition of Plekhanov:

“A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator present only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people.”

Marks, having no conception of the purpose of demands, departed quite explicitly from this formula: “Of course, this very situation” (of contradictions, with the troops’ presence being approved) “increases the need to expose on every occasion in propaganda and discussion [our emphasis] the role the British play”. Apart from anything else, it made clear on what scale they must ultimately come down. But those who conclude that raising the demand for withdrawal in the present situation [emphasis Marks] would “therefore follow, do not understand the difference between propaganda and agitation.”

We say one thing in “discussion and propaganda” and another “in the present situation”. He conceptually and inevitably supplements the theoretical tract, agitational speech or represents a purely executive function.

Lenin gave an example of a “concrete action”, the signing of petitions: “The call for this action comes directly from the theoreticians, the propagandists and the agitators, and, indirectly, from those workers who carry the petition lists to the factories and private houses.” (See Chap. III section B for the rest of the argument.)

Explicit though he is about “calls to action”, Marks is still not clear what it’s all about. In discussions, when challenged to define agitation and propaganda, he and other EC members have trotted out the Plekhanov definition, not realising where they had departed from it. The practice, however, shows clearly just which method and definition they do adhere to.

The point about the Plekhanov formulation is, of course, that the “single idea” put over in agitation is not just any old idea but a correct idea; not in antithesis to the larger complex of ideas that is propaganda, but flowing out of it and, again, leading back to it. Taking this definition together with I.S.’s practice, the only thing it can mean is that you tell most of your “in the present situation” arguments the headlines and slogans were labelled “agitation”, you tell the rest of the arguments.)

The Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet, IS and Ireland

Marks might have been paraphrasing Martynov, in that passage which Lenin (in What is to be Done?) sarcastically described as rendering Plekhanov more profound. “By agitation, in the strict sense of the word, we would understand calling the masses to certain concrete actions...” In reply, Lenin pointed to ‘agitation’ being more or less directly connected with “action”. One couldn’t make that a criterion for separating out one type of work.

To combine a third sphere, or third function, of practical activity [as well as propaganda and agitation] and to include in this third function ‘calling the masses to certain concrete actions’ is sheer nonsense, because the “call”, as a single act, either naturally and inevitably supplements the theoretical tract, agitational speech or represents a purely executive function.

The Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet, IS and Ireland

Trotsk yists debate Irelan d

1. Calls to action

Stephen Marks, Socialist Worker, 16 September 1969

Those who... demand... withdrawal in the present situation... do not understand the difference between propaganda and agitation and between strategy and tactics. Marxism is not an alternative description of the world but a guide to action. And slogans are not just an expression of the fine feeling of those who utter them, or even a playful device of the summing-up of a political argument. For those involved in a struggle they are calls to action.

To say the immediate enemy in Ulster is the British troops is incorrect. At the present time it is the Paisleyites who threaten murder and, in particular, the physical elimination of those in whose hands lie the key to any socialist strategy for Ireland. To prevent illusion in the role of the troops, and to prepare for a future turn in the situation when the target of the struggle of these workers will be the interests of British capital itself, and not merely of its local retainers, socialists must constantly explain the role of the troops, as Socialist Worker has done in the consequences. Only then will we understand the difference between “propaganda and agitation”.

But those who raise the demand for withdrawal now must explain how they would implement that demand if they were behind the barricades in Derry or Belfast. Would they then transform the struggle into a “call to arms”? They would not, as we explained them to a mass of people”.

To combine a demand for withdrawal with a demand for the arming of Catholic workers is to solve the problem only at the level of the mounting of slogans. In real life, the two demands are in contradiction. If both raised at the present time, for the naming of the two sides, it would be dependent on the precarious breathing space the presence of the troops provides. But if the demand for withdrawal in the present situation does not flow from a false generalisation of the relation of forces, it can only mean one of two things:

- either the conscious advocacy of a massacre now, presumably as a means of raising the level of struggle (a demand we would invite the supporters to raise behind the barricades);
- or else it could be justified with the excuse that raising slogans will not lead to the departure of the troops and therefore one need not be worried. But in that case we need only say those who do not take their own slogans seriously cannot expect others to do so.
The agitation of a mass party, counting among its members hundreds or thousands of the grassroots leaders of the working class, might lead more directly to mass action — because it is directed immediately to the masses — than would its propaganda, or the propaganda and agitation of a much smaller group.

Even if one accepted the view of Marks and Martynov, that there is a fundamental difference in aims between agitation and propaganda, it is yet another question whether this can be applied to IS. If it is not big enough for its agitation to be a “call to action” in any practical sense, then even if one wants to follow Martynov, one is nevertheless bound by the Plekhanov conception.

On the level of a factory, or maybe in certain conditions in an industry, IS can agitate and can aspire to have mass influence which can at times either lead to action or affect action being taken. On the level of national and international politics, however, IS is confined to a propaganda role. On Ireland, propaganda and agitation converge for a group like IS: IS could only agitate in the Plekhanov sense, seizing on illuminating facts to illustrate and highlight propaganda, summing up and underlining an argument in a slogan or demand. We could not make “calls to action” to the masses in Derry and Belfast, or even “to the masses” in Britain — except in the spirit of propaganda and education. Any other estimation of IS’s influence is illusory.

3. The greater threat
Reply to the Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet by John Palmer and Stephen Marks on behalf of the IS/SWP leadership

“How Martynov, having rendered Plekhanov more profound, was reborn in IS - a member of Workers’ Fight”† (i.e. the Trotskyist Tendency)...

The first proposition, the correct one, is that there must be no contradiction between strategy and tactics, propaganda and agitation, headlines and text, or between any of the forms of communication of a socialist organisation. The second proposition, confounded with the first, is that there must be no difference in the slogans etc. advanced in different situations, whatever the objective situation, relation of forces, contradictions in the enemy camp etc. Thus they confound opposition to a stages theory with the denial that stages exist at all.

In Ireland IS conceded that the immediate threat from the Paisleyite armed gangs was greater than it was from the British troops, but argued against any demobilisation politically or militarily, called for no confidence in concessions to the troops, constantly warned that once they had contained Paisleyism they would turn on the Catholic workers and the Left, and called for the extension of the struggle to the South.

4. When were the stages?
Trotskyist Tendency reply to Palmer and Marks

In his article Fine Slogans and Grim Reality (Socialist Worker 18 September 1969) Comrade Marks identifies agitation (slogans) with calls to action, and propaganda (small print) with education. This is the mistake Martynov made in “rendering Plekhanov more profound”.

Lenin showed that agitation and propaganda are both educational and could both lead to action, and that they both come from a common source — our programme and analysis of reality. Martynov made this artificial distinction between agitation and propaganda because he wanted to be a Marxist in “discussion and propaganda” but not in his “calls to action”.

Comrades Marks and Palmer don’t bother to defend the article. Instead they decide that attack is the best form of defence. Instead of them having an opportunistic conception of the difference between agitation and propaganda, we have apparently a sectarian conception of the difference — i.e. we don’t relate our tactics to reality, we are abstract propagandists. Unfortunately they don’t try to substantiate this assertion.

If it was sectarian to say that the troops were not there with parallel interests to the Catholic workers, but to attack them (and not in the distant future but here and now, even if not physically) and crystallise this with the slogan British Troops Out — then we pleaded guilty. But who was it who ignored reality?

In his article Marks talked about “a future turn in the situation when the demolition of the barricades may be needed in the interests of British capital itself”. Now according to his logic, when the troops did start taking down the barricades (that very same week) then the first stage — troops plus Catholics v. Paisleyites — had finished. Shouldn’t IS then have re-inorporated the demand for troops to go?
Trotskyists debate Ireland

The New Internationals, June 1939

(I exchanged letters in about 1970 with George Lavan Weissman, an SWP-USA old-timer, about who “V F” might have been. Nobody Weissman could contact in the SWP remembered).

The importance of the Irish question is increased manifold by the presence in America, England, and Australia of millions of Irish proletarians, whose attitude toward our movement is largely dependent upon our position on Ireland. It is therefore mandatory that we face the problem soberly and analytically.

Comrade Morgan’s article is unfortunately compounded of pure emotion, and in addition involves numerous distortions and mis-statements of fact. (For example, contrary to Morgan’s statements, Ireland never provided the bulk of the wheat consumed in England, and the famine of 1846 was caused not by the repeal of the Corn Laws but by the potato blight of the preceding year).

Sympathy for Ireland’s wrongs and hatred of the British empire are not a sufficient basis for deducing the proper policies and measures of our movement. The following are the conclusions of the old policies pursued, and 2) What policies can achieve the desired results.

Ireland alone of all British possessions may be said to have been a colony by actuall, the future of an independent Ireland is always aimed at absorption rather than segregation of the Irish. Had this aim been achieved (as in the case of the Scott. and Welsh), Ireland would today be part of the British monarchy, and the Irish would be petty stockholders in the great British state.

This policy failed primarily because the Protestant Reformation came at a time when Ireland was not ready for it. The Irish family structure was based on the kinship system, and the kinship system was strongly opposed to the Reformation. In addition, the Irish were not ready for the new ideas of the Reformation, and they were not ready for the changes that would come with the Reformation.

The early rebellions in Ireland contained no progressive features. During the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries, the English occupation of Ireland was mainly due to the need for land. The English planters did not have the money to buy land, so they had to take land from the Irish. The Irish were not ready for the new ideas of the Reformation, and they were not ready for the changes that would come with the Reformation.

First, comrade Morgan mentions the newly formed Irish Republican Brotherhood as a progressive movement. How do they convince England’s workers to Ireland’s situation? Where is the evidence of the healthy effect of these movements as a tactic? As an example, by Mahatma Gandhi (and incidentally in the United States, where P. Gandhi plans them so that he will appear to the masses as a substitute for their action, as their redeemer and savior. When Gandhi fasts, India stands still and is “saved”—for the British workers.

In addition, there are two serious omissions in the article.

First, comrade Morgan mentions the newly formed Irish Republican Brotherhood as a progressive movement of the IRA. He says they are men who go about their business. What is their business and how does it differ from that of the IRA? Precisely what is the IRA?

Secondly—and most important—there is absolutely not a word on class struggle, on class participation, on the workers, or in the form of the future British and Irish working-class movement—in its trade union and socialist form. Or is there no labor movement?

I strongly suggest that what is needed is a more scientific and exhaustive study of the Irish question—one based less on emotional longings and wishful-thinking than Morgan has given us.

V. F.

Ireland and Ulster

The New Internationals, June 1939

It is necessary to be unapologetically critical of the “program” of the Irish workers’ movement. The workers’ movement in Ireland has not succeeded because it has not been able to develop its class consciousness and to organize the working class in a revolutionary manner. The workers’ movement in Ireland has not succeeded because it has not been able to develop its class consciousness and to organize the working class in a revolutionary manner.

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I strongly suggest that what is needed is a more scientific and exhaustive study of the Irish question—one based less on emotional longings and wishful-thinking than Morgan has given us.
William John McAulind
Irish Labour and the Bombings

The New International, August 1939

Though Ireland’s population is a mere four millions the Irish question is of international revolutionary importance both because Ireland’s strategic position athwart Britain and because there are some twenty million folk of immediate Irish extraction outside Ireland who are liable to be swayed by Irish nationalist sentiment.

In the States that sentiment operating through Clan na Gael was a big factor in blocking an Anglo-American alliance under Roosevelt the First.

Comrade Sherman Stanley is correct in demanding a scientific and exhaustive study of the Irish question but I’m not sure such a study wouldn’t bring him pretty close to comrade Morgan. If the Irish Republican Army should become a valuable revolutionary force in the future it will be in some degree due to the sympathetic efforts to understand their problems and to give them the help such as comrade Morgan. Caucus cracking-down on them for failure to work in accordance with principles of which most of them have never heard would merely drive the Irish workers closer to the Irish Fascists.

Before I go any further I want to assure comrade Stanley that the I.R.A. has no relations, ambiguous or otherwise, with De Valera or Franco nor can I imagine what led him to suppose otherwise.

My own creative work on Irish affairs, particularly matters regarding the Border dispute between Eire and Northern Ireland, was born in Northern Ireland of Down Protestants. I was brought up in Tyrone and East Donegal among a mixed Protestant and Catholic population, and I learned the Irish language living among the native Gaelic-speaking peasantry of West Donegal. My Presbyterian paternal great-grandfather fought against the British in Down in 1798 as a member of the United Irishmen, their aim an Irish Republic with “The Rights of Man” as their program.

Ireland unfree is not going to be an ally of Britain, so far as the plain people are concerned irrespective of the Government, and what socially-conscious folk ought to try to stop is the likely progress of rank-and-file Irish nationalism from being rightly and naturally anti-British Empire to being ignominiously and shamefully pro-fascist.

The vast majority of Irish industrial workers and many professional workers are fully organized in labor unions which are linked into one organization by the Irish Trade Union Congress. A weakness is the rivalry between national union and British unions which operate here but are affiliated to the T.U.C.

In point of fact for an industrially backward country Ireland has been remarkably progressive as regards labor unionism and has sent missionaries abroad as potent in their way as were the Irish Christian missionaries of early mediaeval days — Brunnerite O’Brien and Feargas O’Connor of the Churchill Government. Connolly and Jannsly are names that spring to mind.

Labor unionism here is remarkably poor in theory but strong in practical actions. By 1938 the Irish workers, economically illiterate, tend in practise not merely to fight secessionally for better wages and conditions but as a whole show a high standard of class solidarity. There is no worse in-suit to an Irishman than to call him “scab”. Class solidarity is equally noticeable among the peasantry.

Economically illiterate, the majority of the Irish workers believed that the war against the British in 1919-1921 would, by bringing self-government, bring about a kind of Utopia here. The still potent-organisation of unskilled workers, Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, reached its highest level in numbers and influence at that period, but the political side of the labor movement, became of real importance under Connolly prior to his execution in 1916, was revamped in political nationalism.

That political and industrial labor organization received a setback from which it is still recovering was due to the dissolution which spread to all departments of life in Ireland, but very specially to the Pontifical Filial role which the Irish Labor Party leadership adopted from the beginning of that crisis. They thought it was advisable to assume leadership of a genuine revolutionary movement.

Today the labor union movement is definitely on the up-grade and the workers have a more advanced experience which fails to the limited workers to learn from textbooks. The same cannot be said of the Irish Labor Party which continues to play an opportunist, cowardly, vacillating and evasive role, and, this and cannot be too strongly emphasized, it contains very good elements in the shape of Connolly veterans, clear-headed young folk and I.R.A. who have had their viewpoint widened by experience. The Dublin branches in particular contain a number of sincere, intelligent and hard-working socialists who are trying to get past their leaders a message to the masses which is Marxist in essence and, in bright contrast to the collaboration with the so-called democratic governments preached by the Connolly party of the I.R.A.

The record which earns condemnation for the Labor Party leadership is this. In 1922, instead of giving a revolutionary lead, it vocally condemned both parties to the Civil War on quite arguable premises but gave material support to the pro-imperialist side. Today that leadership is vocally as violently pro-imperialist as the I.R.A. itself but has not regained the confidence of the working class masses. It thanks to the high heavens in protest at fascist aggression in Austria, Czechoslovakia and China, but it remained silent while fascism crushed the Spanish workers. It piously condemns the bureaucracy of the U.S.S.R. but ignores that of the U.S.A.

Only last month, to secure the support of the petty-bourgeois elementary teachers’ union it agreed to discard the first plank in its own program and the very slogan on which James Connolly based his labor political program: that its aim is the establishment of an Irish Workers’ Republic.

— Dublin, June 6, 1939

Timeline

1916, April: Easter Rising in Dublin
1918, December: Westminster general election in which Sinn Fein wins a majority of the seats in Ireland. Its MPs refuse to go to Westminster, and instead form a separate Irish Parliament. Declaration of independence.
1919-21: Irish war of independence
1921-2: Treaty between London and Dublin ends the war with the basis of an agreement for an independent Ireland. The southern 26 counties of Ireland, and the six north-eastern counties remaining with Britain with some home rule. Treaty of Dublin: Civil war in the 26 counties over the terms of the Treaty.
1932: Fianna Fail, formed by a large contingent of the anti-Treaty forces from the civil war going into parliamentary politics, wins government. Over the next six years it gradually transforms the restricted independence of the 1921-2 Treaty into de facto full independence.
1936: Dismantling of agreement of the last three British naval bases in Ireland
1939: IRA ultimatum to Britain and declaration of war
1949: A coalition government in Dublin formally declares the Irish Republic and, unlike Catholic Ireland.
1966: Ian Paisley and others organise militant sectarian Protestant groups in Northern Ireland to resist moves to uprumpereffion between London, Dublin, and Belfast
1967: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association formed, and steps up a campaign for civil rights for Catholics in Northern Ireland.
1968: October: Violent attacks by Northern Ireland’s Protestant-dominated police force on a civil rights demonstration make Northern Ireland’s civil rights movement an international issue.
1969, August: Increasing polarisation between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, generated by continuing civil rights militancy and a Protestant backlash, brings Northern Ireland to the brink of civil war. British troops are sent onto the streets to hold the ring. They soon take down the barricades which Catholic areas have erected in self-defence.
1971, August: Sweep ing measures of internment without trial are enforced throughout the whole of Catholic Ireland.
1972, March: British government dissolves the Belfast parliament and takes Northern Ireland under direct rule
1973: A new emergency government victorious in the Provisional IRA’s campaign
1973, March: Britain dissolves the Belfast parliament and takes Northern Ireland under direct rule
1975: Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement.
1978: Provisional IRA declares a ceasefire. Later suspended, but then made definite from July 1977
1978, July: Good Friday Agreement. This agreement provides for power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, and a complex system of checks and balances.
1979, July: First power-sharing government in Northern Ireland under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Provisional IRA declared a provisional wing of the Provisional IRA, begins its turn to electoral politics
1985: Anglo-Irish Agreement formalises Dublin-London consultation on Northern Ireland affairs
1986: Provisional IRA’s ceasefire is a deoroom. Later suspended, but then made definite from July 1997
1998, April: Good Friday Agreement. This agreement provides for power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, and a complex system of checks and balances.
1999, July: First power-sharing government in Northern Ireland under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Provisional IRA declared a provisional wing of the Provisional IRA, begins its turn to electoral politics
2003: Good Friday Agreement. This agreement provides for power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, and a complex system of checks and balances.
2005, December: Provisional IRA’s ceasefire is a deoroom. Later suspended, but then made definite from July 1997
2007, July: Good Friday Agreement. This agreement provides for power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, and a complex system of checks and balances.