

# AN REABHLOID

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# AN REABHLOID

AN REABHLOID [The revolution] is the political journal of Peoples Democracy. Normally unsigned articles will indicate a formal statement of the views of the organisation. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Peoples Democracy. We welcome submissions on the issues raised in the journal from outside our organisation.

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In the first issue of An Reabhloid we have taken up the theme of the 1916 rising 70 years on and its relevance for today.

### COMMUNISTS AND THE EASTER RISING

This article commemorates the 70th anniversary of the rising by looking at how the great international leaders of the socialist movement understood the rising and what it represented in the worldwide struggle for socialism. While we may disagree with some of their various conclusions, their method of approaching and analysing the events are still salutary examples for socialists and republicans today.

### IS THE 1916 PROCLAMATION GOOD ENOUGH TODAY?

Takes up the need to take account of the changes since 1916. It explains some of the most important elements in our analysis of Irish society and the strategy and programme for an Irish revolution.

### THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

Today's precise situation of the imperialist offensive around the Anglo-Irish deal and the need to apply these lessons to meet this offensive are the subjects of this article. The general analysis of the deal was adopted unanimously at the May 4th meeting of PD's National committee. Our next issue will update and develop this analysis.

### A CHARTER OF FREEDOM FOR IRELAND

Links up many of the issues in the journal by suggesting ways in which socialists and republicans can collaborate in the development of a freedom charter.

### LIMERICK P.D. leads the way

Peoples Democracy is an activist organisation positively involved in the struggles of working people. In Limerick our long record of such activity has led to the election of one of our members to the local council. Here we publish his stand against cuts and tax increases and our revolutionary socialist alternative.

### SOUTH AFRICA - THE DEVELOPING REVOLUTION

The discussion on South Africa is reproduced not just to inform our readers on the developments and debates about the unfolding struggle there but to show that the issues of strategy and programme that we are raising are not unique to Ireland. Indeed this discussion shows how underdeveloped the debate in Ireland is despite the length of our struggle.

As we have said we hope we can stimulate debate on these questions. To do this we welcome comments, questions, letters and contributions on these and other questions readers think important to the struggle for national liberation and socialism in Ireland.

# EDITORIAL

This is the first issue of An Reabhlóid [The Revolution] which we hope will gain a prominent place on the bookshelf of every socialist, republican and trade union activist. It deserves to because we will be dealing with important questions which no other anti-imperialist publication has addressed.

Our first task is to provide a forum for socialist analysis. This isn't a question of abstract theorising for armchair revolutionaries. It's a vital necessity for all those who have taken part, at whatever level, in the anti-imperialist struggle over the past 17 years. It's vital for those who still have to join it.

For example only with an understanding of what the Anglo-Irish agreement is all about does it become absolutely clear that the anti-imperialist movement needs to stop spectating at the conflict between loyalism and the British and become the real opposition to this deal. The fact that we face this offensive by imperialism only 5 years after the hunger strike smashed its criminalisation policy and following hard on the heels of Sinn Féin election victories needs explaining. What are the fundamental weaknesses of the anti-imperialist struggle that allows Britain to go on the offensive?

This raises the question of not just correctly analysing the offensive but also analysing the weakness of the anti-imperialist struggle so far. This brings us to the second task of An Reabhlóid - to begin a debate on the strategy and programme necessary for an Irish revolution. The lack of such a strategy is glaringly obvious and the longer the struggle goes on the more keenly the absence is felt. The republican policy of "Armalite and ballot box" is not such a strategy. It does not guide us to the forces which will make the revolution, the programme and methods of struggle necessary to mobilise them nor clearly state what sort of revolution we are aiming at.

Peoples Democracy doesn't claim to have full answers to these questions but as marxists we have a class analysis and experience of struggles throughout the world which gives us certain pointers to them. Full clarification however requires a debate within the anti-imperialist movement, a debate we hope An Reabhlóid will be central to. This is why we hope readers will write to us whether you agree or disagree with what we have to say.

In carrying out these aims we will be countering much of the rubbish which passes for socialism and marxism in Ireland today. Many so-called socialists distinguish themselves by opposing and/or condemning the struggle for national liberation rather than seeing it as part of the combined revolution which is necessary - a revolution which combines the fight for socialism and national liberation and puts neither on the long finger. The workers party and Irish labour party, with its apologists in the militant, are examples of these pro-imperialist, red white and blue socialists.

Instead we hope An Reabhlóid will play an important part in explaining and developing the socialism and marxism which Peoples Democracy has stood for and which we believe is vital to the outcome of the present struggle. This socialism is first and foremost internationalist, which is why we are affiliated to the Fourth International - a worldwide organisation with sections in over 50 countries, set up by Leon Trotsky in 1938. It therefore stands as the only international alternative to the Stalinists who have so discredited socialism in the eyes of workers around the world.

# COMMUNISTS AND THE EASTER RISING

by D.R. O'Connor Lysaght.

The 70th anniversary of the Easter Rising provides the opportunity to consider it not only in itself but as a guide to those who reacted to it. This is particularly necessary in the case of the future leaders of the Communist International. To them there has been attributed in turn uncritical support and in some circles an equally unscientific rejection of the event.

The two opposing schools of thought have agreed in acting in a manner to which their subjects would have objected. Their alleged praise or strictures are related only to Ireland out of the context of the debates in which their positions were stated. The result tends to benefit the new revisionist school of thought rather than that of its opponents. By the sheer scale of his abuse of Napoleon III, Victor Hugo added to that individual's importance when he was trying to minimise it. So, by isolating Ireland in international revolutionary Marxist thinking, those who hope thereby to magnify its importance therein succeed only in making it an individual issue that can be dismissed as unrelated to its advocates' overall views and dismissed accordingly. On the other hand such isolation keeps discussion of the Rising at a parochial level that serves to boost the most bourgeois aspects of nationalism and give extra excuse for revisionists to declare their opposition to it.

The isolation technique is expressed in two ways, the one historical and the other geographical. Together they tend to turn the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin on Ireland into holy gospel writ unrelated to their circumstances.

The first point to remember even if it is flogged often enough today is that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, unlike Arthur Griffith or the old republican Brian O'Higgins had as their priority not to win an independent Ireland but to achieve a socialist world in which such independence would in practice have less significance than Home Rule, though it would not be subject to British or indeed European landlord or capitalist imperialist interests. That this aim led them to support Irish national claims gives this backing all the more value. They saw the Irish independence struggle as an important, if small contribution to meeting the overall needs of humanity. Of course, it could not fulfil these needs by itself but it could help towards fulfilling them.

## MARX AND ENGELS

Certainly today what Marx and Engels decided about Ireland is less important than how they decided it. The world in which they lived was one in which the capitalist system in its then most advanced form (industrialism) was established only in Britain though it was developing in Europe, North America and later Japan. There was no one international economy though the British Empire was already one such.

In these circumstances, Marx and Engels' approach to national questions could not be formulated as a general principle. They judged each issue according to its effect on the workers' revolution in capitalist Britain, on the democratic struggles in Europe and on the development of capitalism in Asia, Africa and Latin America. On the second basis Engels expressed the doubts that he shared with Marx

about the war for Italian unity since it would tend to weaken Austria, then apparently the strongest German power, and hence strengthen Tsarist Russia, the enemy of European democracy.

The national struggles of the Irish were a different matter. Both Marx and Engels agreed that the parliamentary union with Britain had to be ended in favour of separate assemblies that would be hopefully democratic and certainly more representative of their countries' populations than the old Irish parliament had been. After separation, however, there might come federation. They saw that the union strengthened the landlords who dominated British capitalism and believed that because the union had weakened the Irish economy and impoverished Irish workers the latter were reducing wages in Britain though this is doubtful. (2)

They changed their opinion as to how this was to be done several times. At the time of the Famine and of the British Chartist Movement they believed that the said movement's success would result in Britain breaking the union. Then Chartism collapsed, the Fenian movement rose and the American Civil War raised the possibility of war between Britain and the U.S.A. England's difficulty might yet be Ireland's opportunity. Marx and Engels now considered that the Irish might establish their own revolutionary republic. When the Fenians had been defeated and British-American relations repaired they sought to involve their International Workingman's Association in the struggle by getting Ireland represented on its Executive by an ex-Fenian. The International collapsed and British military strength remained too great for an isolated national rebellion so they



MARX

changed their strategy to one of support for reform of 'Home Rule' (then understood to be close to what was then Dominion status) as a possible means toward the end of full separation. 'Home Rule's' positive possibilities were increased by the decline in land prices caused by increased food imports from America and the Empire and the resulting ability of the British Government to subsidise the purchase of the landlord's estates for the tenants to buy. Finally, after Marx' death, Engels welcomed the possibility of independent Irish labour candidates though he did not live to see them run. (3)

### THE IRISH QUESTION AND THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

By Engels' death in 1895 a new Second International was in being. Though this was dominated by conscious followers of Marx (unlike its predecessor), they had to develop his teachings under different circumstances. Britain was by now merely the oldest and least vigorous of several industrial countries, all dominated by finance capital. To increase its profits each of its concerns had their host country aid them in exporting their capital, thus uniting the world on their own terms.

This had two immediate results. In the first place the national question was no longer simply a series of tactical questions as to the best choice for individual democratic and socialist movements. It was possible to see a pattern in such choices and to deduce from it a principle. More particularly Irish national demands (like those of the Poles also made a priority by Marx and Engels) became those of just another oppressed nation. (4)

Several leaders of the Second International tried to develop general Marxist analyses of the national question. The two most relevant here were on its revolutionary wing: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. (Connolly another revolutionary was very much on its periphery). The International's most prominent theorist Karl Kautsky wrote about Ireland in the 1890s and, as an honest reformist, in 1922. The first articles would influence all the revolutionary commentators on 1916 and a subsequent generation of reformists has disinterred and published his later work. (5)

Partly because she was reacting against the extreme chauvinist, petit bourgeois Polish Socialist Party (P.S.P), Rosa Luxemburg was for a time the pacesetter for the left. She had little to say about Ireland save in one of her earliest polemics with the P.S.P. when she asked satirically:-

'If the national liberation of Poland is elevated to a political goal of the international proletariat, why not also the liberation of Czechoslovakia, Ireland and Alsace-Lorraine?' (6)

As she considered all four demands (except perhaps the last) were utopian, the historical joke was on her.

However, Rosa Luxemburg's arguments were relevant to revolutionary socialists' approach to the Easter Rising because they provided the basis for Radek's article which sparked off the debate.

Her main work on the national question appeared between 1908 and 1909 in a series of articles 'The National Question and Autonomy'. In them she used a wide range of facts to attack the Russian Social Democrats for their programmatic demand for the self-determination of nations. She insisted that this avoided the real national issues. In practice no nation was economically self-sufficient enough to determine its destiny under capitalism, whilst under socialism no nation would need to make such a claim. Either way the valid, essentially cultural, claims of nationhood could be answered best by local autonomy within the existing state boundaries. (7)

Her premises were not wrong in themselves. Today despite an increase in the number of states beyond anything she



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imagined only the largest are genuinely economically independent. Similarly, under Socialism properly understood the right of the nation will be reduced to a form of autonomy within the world state. Where she went wrong was in her lack of recognition of nationalism's continuing positive revolutionary role.

Her attack was not answered by Lenin until 1913. He did not reply to her points so much as transcend them. A nation that desires to separate from a state and is prevented from doing so is oppressed. Not only that but the people in the oppressor state have their liberties curtailed by the bonds of chauvinism preventing them from dealing with their own problems. Contrariwise, the struggle of an oppressed nationality against the oppressor will tend to strengthen that feeling in the latter. To Rosa Luxemburg's point that Polish nationalism involved the claim not just for independence from Russia, Austria and Germany, but for the 'pre-partition frontiers' and the right for Poles to deny self-determination to Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Byelo-Russians he remarked that this limited but did not negate the right; it stopped where it meant denying itself to others. He did not trouble to reply to her economic argument, merely stressing that the concept was a purely political one. As far as it was possible democracy and hence Socialism would be served best by the division of Europe and indeed the World into units corresponding as far as possible to national entities. (8)

### LENIN'S EARLY WRITINGS ON IRELAND

It is not coincidental that the period in which Lenin developed his view of the national question, 1913 - 1916, was the same as that of his major writing on Ireland.

Before 1913 his interest in the country had been centred mainly on Kautsky's description of the British solution of the land problem. He used it as an example of successful capitalist land reform. (9)

In fact the reform was not as thoroughgoing as he believed. Nor was it the only change that had occurred in Ireland since Marx' time. Then the landlords had been the backbone of resistance even to 'Home Rule'. Now the core of opposition was in the imperialist centre, the City of London, and its pressure had succeeded in debating the original Home Rule

proposals. Now it feared that to allow Ireland's autonomy would strengthen opposition to its imperialist interests from the British workers and in the imperial colonies. Because of this it had used the Orange Order to stimulate the latest opposition to 'Home Rule' that existed amongst the Ulster Protestants.

Lenin's Irish articles do not altogether take these factors into account. This gives his evaluation a somewhat one-sided perspective. Accepting the full solution of the land question and ignoring the new base for the opposition to 'Home Rule' (the leader, Carson, he described inaccurately as a 'Black Hundred Landlord'), he tended to accept the inevitability of that measure (and to over-estimate its significance). (10)

The strength of his analyses lies in their description of the positive aspects of the current struggles; the growth of Larkinism and of a new independent Irish Labour Party with more staying power than that welcomed by Engels. He saw also that both the left (Larkinite) and the anti-Home Rule struggles had in their different ways the potential for educating the workers of Britain and Ireland about the real nature of their state's constitution. In common with most left-wing commentators, however, he under-estimated the ability of the reformist leaders to keep their followers from learning such lessons!!

Above all his commitment remains clear. In the last of his pre-1916 writings on Ireland, on 12th December 1914, he wrote:-

'Our model will always be Marx who, after living in Britain for decades and becoming half-English, demanded freedom and national independence for Ireland in the interests of the socialist movement of the British workers.' (12)

#### THE REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS' RESPONSES TO THE EASTER RISING

By the time of the last quotation the World situation had changed qualitatively as a result of the First World War. The Second International had collapsed into its different sections.

Many once regarded as internationalists had exposed themselves as Chauvinists.

In Ireland a possible military struggle against 'Home Rule' was postponed. The Home Rule Act was passed but its operation stalled until peace. Both Home Rulers and Unionists joined the British Army to fight for Catholic Belgium and against Catholic Austria according to taste.

The bourgeois nationalist politicians knew the fragility of this agreement. The mere passing of the Home Rule Act could not maintain their followers' support. So they claimed that the Act was in operation or that it would be, perhaps before the end of 1915, by which time they expected the war to be over. When neither event took place it was not an immediate disaster. Nonetheless, the failure helped a process of disillusion. (13)

In addition, there was an economic factor. Many homes sold their breadwinners or their sons as cannon fodder and got in return a regular economic wage, sometimes higher than they had received previously. However, neither this nor the ordinary pay rates could compensate for wartime inflation. Working-class militancy began to revive. The I.T.G.W.U. led a number of dock strikes. (14)

This was the background to the rebellion that broke out on 24th April 1916.

As it was crushed within a week responses to it from abroad even from the Socialist Internationalists, were slow to appear. The first came from the camp of the Luxembourgeois. Tho' Karl Radek had broken organisationally with Rosa Luxemburg he remained her disciple on national issues. On 9th May May he published in the Swiss *Berner Tagewacht* his article 'The End of a Song' based partly on bulletins from Theodore Rothstein, a future British Communist leader. In it he applied to Ireland Luxemburg's teachings on national self-determination as an implied attack on Lenin and the Russian Social-Democrats' line. (15)

Radek's article is well-researched with a quotation from Swift, amongst others, but its analysis is weakened by its purpose. Its one positive feature is its recognition of Britain's



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strategic stake in its control of Ireland. Otherwise its argument is summarised in the opening of its second paragraph: 'The Irish question was (sic) an agrarian question.' For Radek the British solved the land problem, the farmers were subsidised ergo the Irish national question was answered. Even autonomy is not mentioned; Radek does not seem to have heard of the Home Rule Act. The Rising is thus seen as a putsch by the 'purely urban petit bourgeois movement Sin (sic) Fein'. The only mention of the working class comes in the last sentence: 'the proletariat - tho' negative, often hostile to (the Republicans') ideals - has written their part with blood in the big book of guilt of those who unleashed the world war.' As this is clearly the proletariat of the world not just of Ireland, so it would seem probable that Radek saw the country as inhabited only by farmers and urban petit bourgeoisie.

Worse than this was his complete lack of perspective. All that matters is that 'the Irish question....has come to an end'. For Radek the Rising had no relevance to the struggles against the war whether in Ireland or internationally. Not only was the Irish 'song' ended but its singers had no role to play in future struggles. The most for which the Easter Rebels could hope was that their names be 'written with blood' in the proletariat's 'book of guilt'.

Such a verdict could not be revolutionary Social Democracy's last word. On 4th July there appeared in the Paris based Russian emigrant journal *Nashe Slovo* Leon Trotsky's article 'Lessons of the Dublin Events'. Trotsky was a Russian Social Democrat opposed both to its moderate (Menshevik) wing but also to Lenin's Bolshevik concept of a necessarily highly conscious leadership for the working-class. He supported fully the party's formula of national self-determination but he agreed with Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the inadequacy of its economic aspects not only objectively but as a subjectively observable fact. Accordingly, he linked national self-determination to the demand for a United State States of Europe. (16)

His doubts about the subjective limitations of the self-determination formula led him to make the weakest statement in his article: 'The basis for national revolution has disappeared even in backward Ireland.' Of course he was dealing with the concept of national revolution in the classic nineteenth century sense of a revolution headed by the bourgeoisie and limited to the creation of a capitalist nation-state. Not to the phenomenon of which he was among the first analysts - the Permanent Revolution, which may begin as a revolution for national claims but must become one for working class demands if it is to achieve even its full democratic, political and cultural programme. That such a struggle was a possibility for Ireland in his eyes is reflected in his admission that the Rising 'amounted in practice to a revolt of the workers, albeit with an influx of petit bourgeois nationalist ideas. It was his belief in the spontaneous development of working class consciousness that led him to dismiss the possibility of that influx being the persistent factor it would prove to be. It also strengthened his readiness to dismiss the base for nationalism as he did.

His mistake was the less fortunate in that, as far as marshalling his facts is concerned, Trotsky's article was the best of the three future Communists' analyses of the Easter Rising. Like both Radek and earlier Lenin he treated the farmers as a bloc. However, not only did he stress the strategic factor (even more than Radek), but he brought the workers into the reckoning (unlike Radek) and (unlike Lenin) his analysis of their role made clear that, despite himself, there was still a base for a form of Irish national revolution even if it would be fulfilled by turning into part of the greater Socialist revolution that he expected for the whole British Isles. At the end he declared that 'the experiment of an Irish national rebellion' was over but that 'the historical role of the Irish proletariat is just beginning.' He did not see that, in practice, his second formulation would cancel the first.

In the same month as Trotsky's article appeared Lenin was completing his final polemic against the Luxemburg view of

the national question, 'The Discussion on Self-Determination Summarised'. He published in *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata* in October, including the chapter 'The Irish Rebellion of 1916', his blistering reply to Radek. (17)

This work has little descriptive analysis of the event discussed beyond his very definite correction of Radek's description of its class content: 'street fighting conducted by a section of the petit bourgeoisie and a section of the workers', (18)

Its main strength lies rather in its application of the principle that he had developed in his previous works: that the World War was not just leading to 'pure' social revolution, but that such revolution would include struggles for aims far less than Socialism,

It has a second strength: a negative one. It avoids Trotsky's mistake of dismissing too readily 'the basis for national revolution'. However, it does not prophecy a more successful Irish Rising. If anything its comment 'it is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely', tends to imply what Trotsky states more explicitly: that such a struggle is unlikely. That Lenin did not believe this was shown in subsequent comments on the subject over the next few months. However, even these statements remain an assertion of possibilities that are on the same level as a possible rising of France's North African possessions. All in all, like Trotsky, he was interested in 1916 mainly as a precursor of general Socialist revolution although he considered it a more effective catalyst than other colonial outbreaks by reason of its closeness to Britain. He was, after all, not an Irish Republican but a Russian Bolshevik who did not pretend to be an expert on the Irish Question. (19)

For all the differences between Lenin, Trotsky and Radek they would work together eighteen months after the Easter



Rising to lead the workers to take state power in Russia and then to found the Third (Communist) International to extend that victory. In this task neither Lenin nor Trotsky hesitated to commit themselves to supporting the revived Irish national struggle. At the International's Second Congress, in August 1920, Lenin proposed:-

'In Ireland, for instance, there are two hundred thousand British soldiers who are applying ferocious terror methods to suppress the Irish. The British Socialists are not conducting any revolutionary propaganda among the soldiers, though our resolutions clearly state that we can accept into the Communist International only the British parties that conduct genuinely revolutionary propaganda among the British workers and soldiers. I emphasise that we have heard no objections to this either here or in the commissions' commissions'. (20)

And Trotsky at the same Congress:-

'The British Socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt and India against the London plutocracy - such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet, but in no case merits either a mandate or the confidence of the proletariat.' (21)

These speeches were made when Britain was fighting and occupying both Ireland and Russia. Nonetheless a year after peace of a sort had been made in both struggles, in 1921, revolutionary Russia backed a statement from the International to the Communist Parties of Great Britain and Ireland urging them to support the militant Irish opponents of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty with Britain. (22)

Such were the Communists of seventy years ago. No doubt times have changed the circumstances. However, those who would argue that they must change diametrically their perspectives should give their reasons or be quiet. Moreover, unless they can argue their case with the factual command of Lenin, Trotsky and even Radek, and with the dialectical command of Lenin, they will lose it by default.

#### FOOTNOTES

- (1) Friedrich Engels, Po und Rhein 1859 (untranslated)
- (2) Marx and Engels, Ireland and the Irish Question, Moscow 1971. PP. 124, 133, 160-163, 281, 292-294, 324-325.  
Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England in Marx and Engels, On Britain, Moscow 1962. PP. 126-127.

See Fergus D'Arcy, The Irish in 19th Century Britain, Irish History Workshop, 1981, for another view of the Irish emigrant workers' role.

- (3) Marx and Engels, Ireland and the Irish Question, op. cit. PP. 45-51, 97, 116, 143, 147-148 160-163, 316-317, 329, 331, 332, 333-336, 353.  
For Ireland's representation in the International Workingmen's Association, see Sean Daly, Ireland and the First International, Cork 1984
- (4) Marx and Engels, Ireland and the Irish Question, op. cit. P.332
- (5) Karl Kautsky, Ireland, Belfast 1974. See also Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, Henry Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, Manchester 1979. P.19.
- (6) Rosa Luxemburg, The National Question, New York and London 1976, PP57-58.
- (7) Ibid. PP. 103-182
- (8) Most of Lenin's contribution to the debate on nationalism is in Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Nationalism, Moscow 1967; see also Collected Works, Volume 41, PP. 319, 374-375.
- (9) Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 4, PP. 250-251; Vol. 6 PP. 496-497; Vol. 13, PP. 287-288; Vol. 19, P.194.
- (10) Ibid., Vol. 19, P.332, Vol. 20, PP. 148-149
- (11) Ibid., Vol. 19, PP.332-335, 348-349; Vol. 20 PP.226-229.
- (12) Ibid., Vol. 21, P.106.
- (13) See Freeman's Journal, 19th Sept. 1914, 1st Oct. 1914, 5th October 1914, 10th October 1914.
- (14) See Irish Times, 2nd October 1915, 7th October 1915, 12th October 1915, 18th November 1915, 5th April 1915; Freeman's Journal, 9th November 1915, 10th November 1915, 16th December 1915, 28th March 1916.
- (15) An abridged version of Radek's article is in Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International, New York 1984, PP. 374-375.
- (16) Ibid. PP. 370-374: see also Marxist Review, 2, Jan-Feb. 1973.
- (17) Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 22, PP. 353-359
- (18) Ibid. P.355
- (19) Ibid. PP.357, 359; Vol. 23, PP. 196, 198.
- (20) Ibid. Vol. 31. P.261.
- (21) Trotsky, The First Five Years of the Communist International, Vol. 1, New York, 1972, P.125.
- (22) Workers Republic, 1st July 1922.

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# IS THE 1916 PROCLAMATION GOOD ENOUGH TODAY?

Joe Carter

This year many organisations have been celebrating the 1916 rising. For many it was celebrated as history, at most remembered but certainly not repeated. However for others it represents the beginning or renewal of a task still uncompleted - the removal of British imperialism. For many republicans and socialists the 1916 Proclamation is still the point of reference and programme for the Irish struggle for freedom. Being true to the sacrifice of 1916 still ranks as a test of today's struggle and of its leaders.

The obvious reason for this is that the Proclamation outlined the main task facing the Irish people and helped ignite the greatest ever struggle for national self-determination in Ireland's long history. It represented a programme all those who desired an independent Ireland could unite on, from Connolly marxists to bourgeois nationalists.

For a successful revolution the key unity required was between the peasantry and the working class, with the latter in the leadership. As Connolly made clear only the working class remained as 'the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland'. Thus Connolly urged his Irish Citizen Army during the Rising:

'In the event of victory, hold on to your rifles. Those with whom we are fighting may cease before our goal is reached. We are for economic and social as well as political liberty'.

## LABOUR MUST WAIT?

The class antagonisms that lay behind this statement were glossed over and obscured in the proclamation. The key need for working class leadership of the struggle was not addressed and not understood either by republicans or the leaders of the labour movement. The republican policy during the Tan war and civil war was summed up by De Valera's statement that 'Labour must wait!'. The claims of working people and their independent organisation and leadership were to wait until Irish freedom was achieved. The attitude of the leaders of the labour movement was in practice just as bad. They stood aside from the national liberation struggle and held back struggles which did take place. After the 1922 election the Irish Labour Party became the official opposition and in effect pro-Treaty, dooming it to minority support ever since.

Despite this lack of leadership the working class and rural poor did take part in the revolution. Land was seized from the landlords, creameries and mines were seized, Limerick workers took over the town and ran it for themselves, and a one day general strike was called to prevent conscription into the British Army. However, like many revolutions before and since, the working poor did the fighting and the representatives of capitalism did the leading. I.R.A. land courts gave land back to the landlord and denounced the land seizures as 'a grave menace to the republic. The mind of the people was being diverted from the struggle for freedom by a class war...' Unlike Connolly the republicans saw political liberty as something completely divorced from social and economic liberty.

Neither pro nor anti Treaty republicans saw the necessity of working class leadership - in fact their leaders were positively opposed to it. Each simply represented a different part of the Irish capitalist class getting the workers to do the fighting and dying for them. The pro-Treatyites represented those large ranchers and capitalists tied most closely to trade with Britain and the anti-Treatyites the would-be capitalists who were concerned to develop an Irish manufacturing capitalism. In the

end neither was prepared to take on imperialism and the republicans who were isolated and without a policy of fighting in the labour movement for it to take up the struggle; without a policy which could offer an alternative to the 'republicanism' of Fianna Fail. The lessons learnt by Connolly were forgotten, if ever learnt in the first place:

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

The acceptance of partition and the policies pursued by the new Cumann na nGaedhail (Fine Gael) government in Dublin showed the correctness of Connolly's vision. The trappings of empire such as the oath of allegiance to the English king continued and the Catholic Church's reactionary teachings, especially in relation to women, came to predominate in social legislation. The economic policies of the new government were indistinguishable from those pursued under British rule. Free trade continued to allow big ranchers to export to Britain and money flowed out of the country in land annuities (payments by Irish farmers to the British government who had previously bought out the landlords) and through the complete dominance of the City of London over Irish capital. A leading official in the Department of Finance wrote in 1923:

'The banks are largely influenced by opinion in London where they keep their reserves, their floating balances and practically all their investment'.

Again Connolly's marxism was able to explain that despite nominal independence the 26 Counties was still dominated by imperialism:

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

## CAPITALIST 'REPUBLICANISM'

Irish working people had never accepted the sell out of the Treaty and it had only been imposed on them through civil war, repression and the demoralisation caused by war weariness and lack of an alternative. For years the alternative that was posed was the renewal of the armed struggle; a 'second round' against the Free State and the British. However after endless hours of slow re-organisation, drilling and training by the I.R.A. the 'second round' seemed no nearer. In 1926 De Valera split and formed Fianna Fail. For many genuine rank and file republicans and for most working people it was realised that political action was needed and simple reliance on the armed struggle was leading nowhere.

Unfortunately the politics offered by Fianna Fail were the

politics of the national bourgeoisie. When Fianna Fail entered the government tariffs (taxes) on imported goods were established and laws limiting foreign ownership of Irish industry were enacted. New industries were set up in construction, shoe, soap, furniture, textiles, confectionary and food processing and at first it seemed to be successful. During the 1930s industrial employment rose by nearly 40% and output by 50%.

Beside these economic policies which lead to the 'economic war' with Britain Fianna Fail, elected on the slogan 'on to the Republic', promised to solve the democratic tasks which had Governor General, the oath of allegiance, the payment of the land annuities, repression was reduced and republican prisoners released. Even to many in the I.R.A. it looked as if De Valera would achieve what the I.R.A. had failed to do, establish an All Ireland Republic. Many left it and joined Fianna Fail which quickly gained the allegiance of the majority of Irish workers.

#### AN ALTERNATIVE?

Neither the republicans nor the labour movement had a class analysis which would have shown that Fianna Fail would fail because no capitalist solution was possible to the struggle for national liberation. The I.R.A. clung to the belief in armed struggle which because it was not regarded as possible in the 26 Counties after Fianna Fail came to power meant that the idea of revolution in the 26 Counties was effectively abandoned. Since then the Republican Movement has had ambiguous attitude to the national bourgeoisie and the institutions of the southern state. While realising it has sold out it hasn't offered any strategy for destroying it in the same unambiguous way it has for destroying the northern state. This does not mean advocating armed struggle in the south; what was and still is needed is a political alternative which recognises Fianna Fail, every bit of it, as capitalist and that only a working class socialist movement can offer an alternative. In the '30s only a minority of the Republican Movement addressed this question through the short lived Republican Congress. Its leaders recognised that the only hope was in the labour movement overcoming its abandonment of the struggle for a Republic.

Unfortunately the labour movement was still lead by people who claimed that such a struggle was a reactionary nationalist one just as many 'socialists' today such as the Workers Party or Militant claim that the fight is now one for socialism pure and simple. Connolly long ago had the answer to such simple arguments:

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

Thus in Ireland we not only have capitalism but national oppression as well. One cannot be solved without the other.

#### RETURN TO OPEN IMPERIALISM

This is why Fianna Fail failed to break the stranglehold of imperialism not only in the 6 Counties but in the 26 as well. By 1958 its economic nationalism was reversed. From 1951 to 1958 industrial employment had fallen from 228,000 to 210,000. This growth in unemployment led to massive emigration and a decline in the 26 County population. In 1954 a book could be written called 'The Vanishing Irish' which postulated the 'fading away of the once great and populous nation of Ireland'. No greater condemnation of bourgeois nationalism could possibly be imagined.

It is useful to look at the reason for this failure in order to explain why there is no capitalist solution to the problem of real national independence; no capitalist road to the ideals of 1916. Despite the tariffs and Irish owned industry policy, no attempt was made to control the massive amount of banking capital which continued to be invested in the London money market. To overcome restrictive laws British firms simply set up branch factories in Ireland and none were ever prosecuted for not really being Irish. No attempt was made to build a capital goods sector (the sector which produces machines which then make consumer goods) and state intervention was limited to the minimum. The policy of Fianna Fail actually increased the 'thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism' which Connolly saw as the root of Irish capitalism's inevitable failure to break with Britain.

To control the outflow of capital, the exploitation of British firms and create a capital goods sector would have meant massive state intervention, a massive investment programme which ignored short term profit. In other words breaking from capitalism and establishing socialism.

The economic U-turn in 1958 was the first confession that Ireland while it remained capitalist could only hope for more dependence and exploitation by imperialism. That this policy was initiated by the 'republicans' of Fianna Fail shows that no



An Easter Rising barricade



Larkin, in a characteristic pose, addresses a labour gathering in O'Connell Street following his return from America in 1923

section of Irish capitalists has any alternative to bowing before imperialism.

The U-turn involved the scrapping of tariffs and any laws impeding trade between Ireland and the rest of the world. It meant encouraging multinational investment in Ireland through large grants and tax incentives and the promise of a skilled, low paid and compliant workforce. Finally it also meant joining the EEC and the increasing compromising of the 26 Counties' neutrality.

At first this strategy seemed to offer some hope. Manufacturing exports on which the whole strategy was based rose by an average of 16% during the 1960s increasing from 7½% of Gross Domestic Product in 1963 to 25% in 1978. Employment in the new foreign owned industries rose from 58,000 to 80,200 between 1973 and 1980. Living standards rose; GNP per person rose from 55% of the UK level in 1951 to 72% in 1970. All this coincided with what many observers saw as the liberalisation of Irish society and a weakening of the power of the church.

#### CAPITALIST CRISIS

Today however such illusions have long since gone. Like earlier policies this particular capitalist strategy has failed. Unemployment in the 26 Counties is increasing and now stands at nearly 20%, one of the highest in the EEC. Income tax has doubled since the early '70s and 80% of all taxes are paid by workers. This at a time when public services are being cut and when Ireland has the greatest proportion of poor in the EEC - 25% living below the official poverty line. This is a figure that can only increase as the various governments have attempted to hold down wages as inflation roars ahead.

On top of this is a major attack on democratic rights, for example the Offences against the State Act and the Criminal Justice Act. Under pressure from Britain more and more money is pumped into 'defending' a border the constitution doesn't even recognise and in attacking long established freedoms such as freedom for political refugees from extradition, jury trials and free speech. Nor finally can much of a case

be made for the 'liberalisation' of Irish society. Reactionary values are once again on the offensive - the anti-abortion referendum, the 'Kerry Babies' case and the superstitious nonsense of 'moving statues' are all recent proof to the contrary.

No doubt both Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and even Labour will be paying lip service to 1916, its leaders and ideals but they have proved themselves totally incapable, in fact opposed, to its message. 'The right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland' is a joke beside the multinational rape of Irish workers. In a situation where 5% of the population owns three quarters of the private wealth the call of the proclamation to 'cherish all the children of the nation equally' is very hollow indeed.

#### 'OLD WINE - NEW BOTTLES'

Yet almost astonishingly these parties which have collaborated in creating the misery, exploitation and repression that exists in much of Ireland today have the cheek to get together and propose a 'Forum for a New Ireland! One might be forgiven for remarking that if this is what they've made of the old Ireland heaven help us from what they've got lined up in the new one.

In reality the Irish bourgeoisie have through the New Ireland Forum created their own proclamation, one that repudiates the democratic demands of national reunification, supports the loyalist veto and promises nothing but repression for those who fight back against the continuing exploitation by imperialism and its native supporters.

All this has been concretised in the Anglo-Irish Agreement with the open collaboration of the southern bourgeoisie in Britain's attempt to put down the anti-imperialist struggle of catholic workers in the north. The green capitalists have now taken upon themselves the responsibility for all the ugly and repressive aspects of the sectarian state in the north without actually having the power to knock off even some of its rough edges. The bickering between Fianna Fail and the Coalition indicates not differences over whether such collaboration is necessary but simply the fear in Fianna Fail that the whole project is too weak to last and may leave all capitalism's rep-

representatives in Ireland exposed when it fails.

This is precisely the task which is set before the working class today, to bring down the Agreement and expose the capitalist and pro-capitalist parties who have supported it. To do this however we need an alternative which can act in very much the same way as the 1916 proclamation acted, as a declaration of the key tasks, a political programme and a call to action.

It is appropriate that as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the rising we examine whether it is adequate for today. As we have already shown it glossed over the question of classes inside Ireland and this lack of clarity has led to the many failures since of those who have sought to finish its task. Today's programme must ruthlessly expose and defeat not just British imperialism but also Irish capitalism. This much has clearly changed since the proclamation was written but it is not all.

\* \* \*

The failure of the 1916 struggle to clearly show the class struggle that was also necessary not only reflected Connolly's weakness in not building a workers' party that could have fought for it, especially after his death. It also reflected the transitional period in which the struggle took place. Throughout the 19th century the class content of the national struggle was one of the Irish peasantry struggling for land against British landlords. The various pieces of land legislation, for example in 1881, 1891 and 1903 and the developing workers' struggles throughout Ireland in the first decade of the 20th century, culminating in the 1913 Dublin lock-out, signalled that the class content of the national struggle was changing from one based on the peasantry to one based on the workers. As Connolly put it: 'The cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be dis severed'

#### GROWTH OF WORKING CLASS

Unfortunately at the time of the rising the Irish working class was a small minority of the Irish population and much of it was that section who had lined themselves up in support of imperialism, the protestant workers in the north. Membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union was only 5,000 at the time of the rising. Unable to impose its leadership on the struggle and, after the death of Connolly, without revolutionary leadership itself it was unable to challenge the bourgeois leadership of the struggle with results we have seen. However, as the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky declared at the time 'the historical role of the Irish proletariat is only beginning'.

In 1922 trade union membership was 189,000. Today it stands at over half a million. Half the workforce is unionised, a higher proportion than in Britain, France, Holland and Germany. Many young people have left the land to seek jobs in the towns and cities and over the last 30 years the rural population has almost halved. Even those who remain to work on the land find their farm too small and have to work in a factory as well. Today nearly half the 26 County population lives in or near Dublin.

Thus Ireland has undergone a real industrialisation which has changed the character of Irish society and the requirements of the struggle needed to change it. The vast majority of Irish people no longer as in 1916 work on the land. Over 30% now work in industry, 50% in service industries and only one in five directly in agriculture. The latter is of course substantially higher than in any developed capitalist society but lower than in Spain, Portugal or Greece.

This is a radically different class structure to that found in most third world states. In India only 13% work in industry, El Salvador 22% and in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua it was between 15 to 18%. Even among the most industrialised third world countries the proportion working in industry is lower than in Ireland; in Mexico 26%, Argentina 28% and Brazil 24%.

Thus despite the importance of agriculture to the Irish economy and the importance of the oppression and exploitation of small farmers the key task facing the struggle for national liberation and socialism is not an alliance between workers and

peasantry as in 1916 but uniting the Irish working class itself.

#### WOMEN

Capitalism and national oppression deliberately creates divisions within the working class to enable it to rule effectively and without serious challenge. In every country a major division is between women and men and Ireland is no exception except that imperialism has intensified women's oppression. Both north and south it is among the most reactionary forces including the protestant and catholic churches which it has relied upon to uphold the status quo, imposing upon women their morals and their ideas about what role women should play in society.

The results are that women are pushed into the home to feed and service the predominantly male workforce at no expense to the state or employers. Only around 30% of the workforce are women, not much more than it was 70 years ago, less than 5% are married women. Both these figures are among the lowest in the EEC. On top of this those who do work are usually in low paid, low status, low skilled and often part time employment, earning on average only about two-thirds of the average

male wage. No struggle claiming to be for freedom can ignore these facts and the growth of a women's movement means that increasingly women themselves are making sure they aren't ignored.

Sixty years ago most women worked on farms or as domestic servants and there were only 15-20,000 women trade unionists. Today 35% of trade unionists are women, over 100,000. By and large however the trade union movement has failed to fight for the specific rights of women, for example only 4% of trade union officials are women. It is clear that a special effort is needed to put women's demands at the top of the agenda; an effort that can only be spear-headed by women themselves. That is why socialists and republicans must support the autonomous organisation of women and see it as a vital ally in the struggle for national liberation and socialism. Without women's liberation neither will be achieved. That is why we should also reject the condemnations of many 'socialists' who see the women's movement as only 'middle class feminists'. The very existence of the women's movement shows that the problems they have raised have not and will not be solved as a simple by-product of the struggle for socialism.

#### THE PROTESTANTS

However, it is the divide between protestant and catholic workers which is seen by many as the greatest obstacle to national liberation and socialism in Ireland and a question not directly addressed by the 1916 rising. It is absolutely vital to understand the nature of the problem because many organisations have failed to do so and have been effectively lost to the struggle against imperialism and for socialism.

Some like the Workers Party have pointed to the unity over trade union issues which have occurred but have then capitulated to loyalism when it comes to raising political demands. Their support for a return to Stormont rule and for the sectarian RUC is the end of a long road begun with genuine concern to come to grips with a real problem.

Others, such as 'Militant', have attempted to build on trade union unity by calling for a party of labour and for socialism. They ignore uncomfortable facts such as that if such a party was to be really representative of the majority of protestant workers, as opposed to a minority of trade union activists, it would be as flawed by bigotry and sectarianism as the old Northern Ireland Labour Party. Their claim that 'socialism' will unite workers is a tautology. To have socialism you need a united working class but as we know the working class is divided. To argue that socialism is the solution to the division simply gets back to the problem again. It is a vicious circle which is lost sight of beneath the sloganising.

The problem has been that unity over trade union issues has shattered when faced with political questions. A correct policy regarding protestant workers needs to start with a correct analysis however uncomfortable the facts are. This was certainly



IRISH TRADE UNIONISTS TODAY

the approach of Connolly:

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

The protestants originated as a settler colonial population with a status and range of privileges enforced by law. Although this colonial system has broken down long ago the most reactionary elements of loyalism have attempted to maintain it; for example through the sectarian riots in the 19th and 20th centuries. To a certain extent they have succeeded as can be seen in the near total dominance of protestant workers in certain industries. They have been most successful however in maintaining their monopoly of political power especially their one party Stormont government which lasted over 60 years. This explains their otherwise irrational opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and why the only consistent democratic policy is total opposition to loyalism and rejection of the loyalist veto.

This does not mean a revolution in Ireland can be made against the protestant working class - 20% of the whole Irish proletariat. It does mean that loyalism must be demoralised, disorganised and destroyed. No struggle can ignore this task or pretend it won't be necessary. It is completely utopian to believe that socialist propaganda can be more powerful than literally centuries of material privileges. Almost as unrealistic is the belief that the catholic working class confined to the north can by itself offer protestant-catholic unity. It is too weak and small to break protestant workers from the alliance with their bosses and imperialism. The only force with both

the power and interest in winning any section of the protestant working class is the majority of nationalist workers in the south south.

#### KEY DIVIDE

This brings us to the key division inside the working class. The division between northern and southern workers whose identity of interest in fighting imperialism has been hidden by the seeming independence of the 26 County state. While southern workers desire unity they do not see it as an immediate question or one that they have to solve.

To overcome this however means overcoming not a geographical division but a political divide which predates partition. It is the division in Irish working class tradition between those who have claimed that economic and social demands are the aim of the labour movement and those who claim that the Irish working class must concentrate on ending national oppression as a precondition of freedom from class oppression.

The industrialisation of Ireland has undoubtedly increased the weight of specifically working class or economic demands in the struggle. Unemployment, taxation, cuts in welfare are obviously greater problems facing greater numbers now than they were in 1916. In addition the very young population because it is sited on the edge of Europe tends to compare its standard of living not with third world countries but with the imperialist countries in Western Europe. The continuing existence of bourgeois democratic freedoms such as the right to organise in trade unions and openly revolutionary political parties tends to reinforce the view of the 'economistic' left that Ireland is somehow not much different from Britain or France and that the revolution here will or should look much like theirs.

In the north there is obviously less justification for such a view. Massive repression and a continuing armed struggle indicate that Ireland is not the same as other West European countries. Even in the south it is not true that the national question has disappeared. The 26 Counties remains dominated by imperialism.

## THE KEY TASK

Nearly half the 1,000 biggest companies in the 26 Counties are foreign owned and the working class is more and more dependent on them for employment. Even those successful Irish companies prefer to invest abroad rather than in Ireland. Most importantly Irish finance is still dominated by imperialism which means that Ireland is even more dominated than many third world countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Hong Kong where some native finance capital has been created. The stranglehold which imperialism has is indicated by the 26 Counties' enormous debt - 128% of Gross National Product and greater per head than Argentina, Mexico or Brazil which are constantly in the news because of their debt problem.

What this means can be demonstrated by the fact that between 1983 and 1984 £1 billion was added to the foreign debt through the rise in price of the dollar without one single thing having happened in Ireland. This is enough to pay for the running of the Department of Health including paying the wages of the 60,000 people who work for it. It is thus impossible to seek to answer the questions raised by cuts in services without pointing out that the money saved from the cuts will go straight into the hands of foreign bankers. It is impossible without bringing out the question of imperialism.

This is essentially a political question and not one of economics which is why the 'economicist' tradition fails to deal with the fundamental problem. Even in its most 'radical' form - the Militant Tendency's advocacy of sweeping nationalisations as almost the equivalent of socialism - fails to confront the question of political power. This is how Connolly explained it:

'State ownership and control is not necessarily socialist - if it were, then the army and the navy, the police, the judges, the gaolers, the informers and hangmen would all be socialist functionaries as they are all state officials - but the ownership by the state of all the lands and material for labour, combined

with the cooperative control by the workers of such land and materials, would be socialist ... To the cry of the middle-class reformers, 'Make this or that the property of the government', we reply - 'yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property.'

This is why the demand and fight for a United Ireland remains the most revolutionary struggle to take place today. It challenges not only the system of rule of imperialism but also of the native capitalists. The anti-imperialist struggle threatens not just the 6 County state but also the 26 County state which is why the bourgeois political parties in the south have been so keen to collaborate with Britain through the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It is why the national question remains at the heart of the struggle for socialism.

\* \* \*

The 1916 Proclamation has acted as the programme for the Irish revolution for a long time. That is why it is reprinted so often and the rising commemorated so consciously. For the Republican Movement the Irish Republic proclaimed in 1916 still needs to be established.

As this article has argued such a republic will never be established unless it is first and foremost a Workers' Republic. To fight for this needs the development of a new programme around which anti-imperialists and class conscious workers can unite. Such a programme cannot be mere statements of policy promising all sorts of good things after the revolution. Instead it must seek to mobilise and organise workers now to fight for anti-imperialist and socialist solutions to the immediate problems facing workers. Our struggle now must show the sort of society we wish to create in the future.

Finally this means not winning workers to the struggle but them and their organisations becoming its leadership. It is therefore not that 'the workers are necessary for the revolution, but the revolution for the workers'.

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# ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

## "A BULWARK AGAINST A UNITED IRELAND"

It's not for nothing that Britain has gained the name 'Perfidious Albion'. It arises from a long diplomatic tradition of lying and duplicity and from wording treaties and deals in such a way that they can mean anything to anyone while preserving British interests.

This tradition is fully expressed in the wording of the Anglo-Irish deal. The confusion it has created is a deliberate part of the deal - the wording, the secret clauses and the pretence that imperialism's subordinates in the Dublin Government are equal partners in the deal all go to deepen confusion and weaken opposition.

A careful reading of the Agreement helps a lot. So too do the statements made by the British and Fitzgerald in response to unionist pressure. They make it quite clear that, far from being a step on the road to a United Ireland the deal is designed to preserve partition, to preserve unionist ascendancy and to preserve British control in Ireland.

But real understanding of the Anglo-Irish Agreement can only come from an understanding of Britain's role in Ireland and British strategy today.

Britain is in Ireland because it owns Ireland. The war of independence and the 'economic war' of the Thirties did not change Britain's majority shareholding in Irish industry. Since the sixties an influx of U.S., European and Japanese capital has made it a minority force in industry, but it still maintains its dominant position in banking, insurance and finance and Ireland remains a top export market. In any case, as the old colonial power, it is expected to act as policeman for all the imperialist powers.

A second major reason is strategic. Britain sees a military base here as essential to maintain her own status as a military power and a lynchpin in coordinating aggression by Britain, Europe and the U.S.



Border Security cost the Republic IRE200m in 1984.

Thirdly there is an intense fear of the Irish revolution. The British see it leading to an Irish Cuba - a socialist revolution on the doorstep of Europe and threatening their hold over their own working class.

So when Thatcher says Out! Out! Out! she means it. Only a mass uprising by the majority of the Irish people will force Britain out of Ireland.

This isn't the whole story. The 50s and early 60s saw the collapse of old native industries, especially in the North, and an influx of multinational capital. The British wanted reform that would weld the economy and infrastructure on both parts of the border into co-ordinated elements of imperialist economic domination. These economic reforms were to be accompanied by cosmetic reform in the North, but even the hint of reform was enough to blow up the whole powder keg and bring the unresolved National Question to the fore.

So British strategy in Ireland can be summed up as follows:

- \* To maintain a presence in Ireland and extend imperialist economic and political domination there.
- \* To preserve Unionism in the North as the only firm base for their military presence and as a bulwark against Irish revolutionary forces and the unity of the working class.
- \* To defeat the republican movement and crush the aspiration for unity and independence among Irish workers.
- \* To develop a new role for the Irish capitalist class as managers of a 'new Ireland' whose economy has been rationalised and restructured to provide maximum benefit for imperialism.

The Sunningdale Agreement was the major attempt to achieve this. It did not mark any move towards a united Ireland but it contained two major concessions to Irish capitalists: 'Power-sharing' in the North and a proposed 'Council of Ireland' to cover the Dublin sell-out. It was sufficient to bring the SDLP and Dublin Government to the forefront in defence of partition and active involvement in repression. The British thought that they had won significant Unionist support for the deal, but elections wiped out the pro-Sunningdale unionists and from that point on the British lost interest. The '74 stoppage and Unionist revolt was pushing against an open door.

The Sunningdale Agreement was not in the interests of Irish workers but its overthrow by Loyalism, rather than Republicanism, marked a setback. The move to the

right that this represented meant that Dublin was able to maintain a high level of collaboration and the British were able to embark on a policy of military victory linked to a criminalisation policy that was to lead to the H-Blocks.

The mass struggle around the prisoners broke that policy, but without breaking the hold of the Irish capitalist parties over the majority of Irish workers. They did, however, have to face up to brutal realities - that the National Question still had the power to pose a mass challenge to their rule and that they could not allow that challenge to continue in a situation of growing poverty and unemployment to which they had no solution.

Out of this sense of desperation they constructed an offensive around the Forum report. Behind all the rhetoric about a United Ireland was the reality that this was to be dropped as even a formal demand. A propaganda drive to prove a United Ireland was impossible was linked to negotiations with the British around the restructuring of partition leading directly to the Anglo-Irish deal.

The British themselves were seriously worried by the H-Block/Armagh struggle and by the Sinn Fein election victories. The Dublin offer was an offer they couldn't refuse and discussion boiled down to the 'reforms' on offer to cover the Dublin sell-out. This quickly became a discussion about what the unionists would accept and that proved to be damned little - a 'consultative role' for Dublin and some restrictions on Orange triumphalism. So part of the ambiguity of the deal was the limitations imposed by the anti-imperialist struggle on what could be agreed. An open abandonment by Dublin of the demand for a United Ireland would have been the basis for a full-blooded counter-revolutionary drive by Imperialism. Instead Dublin is limited to re-stating their support for the Unionist veto - 'a united Ireland by consent' and recognising 'that the present wish is for no change in the status of Northern Ireland'.

In another direction the British could have attempted stability by giving Dublin real authority in the North and co-opting Irish capitalism over the heads of the Unionists. But unionism is too valuable, Irish capitalism too weak and the anti-imperialist movement too strong for that sort of risk to be taken, so instead the Dublin Government are given a consultative role - the 'right' to express an opinion which the British will 'carefully consider'.

The major options having been fudged, it's not surprising that the major thrust of the deal is towards a return to Stormont, or that the SDLP have made yet another retreat - towards a Stormont based on 'widespread acceptance' rather than power-sharing.

All this leaves very little room for concessions. The conference 'will concern itself with measures to recognise and accommodate the rights and identities of the two traditions in Northern Ireland. This includes cultural heritage, electoral arrangements, Flags and Emblems and avoidance of discrimination'.

This is followed by:

'The Irish government may put forward views on the composition of: the Human Rights Commission; the Fair Employment Agency; the Equal Opportunities Commission; the Police Authority and the Police Complaints Board.'

These two elements of the deal are the basis of a new Redmondism. There are no actual concessions - if anything the British record on discrimination, cultural rights and human rights are as bad as they have ever been and there is absolutely no indication of any major move. What the deal does is put the Irish capitalists in the position of lobbyists. Irish workers are to look, not towards revolution or global reforms, but towards a client relationship with capitalists who will have the ear of Britain.



Loyalists march past the scene of earlier rioting in Portadown on Easter Monday (Photo: Pacemaker)



All this is very insubstantial, but it enables Britain and Dublin to get some real business done: A major programme of economic rationalisation on both sides of the border, secret clauses drawing Dublin closer to NATO, and proposals to adopt major aspects of British emergency legislation in the 26 Counties.

Top of the agenda is a 32 County offensive against Republicanism. It's not for nothing that both sides talk of the 'Anglo-Irish process'. They don't have a solution, but they have won some room and a successful offensive against republicanism would win them still more. But Dublin has to get some concession in return, and Britain seems less and less able to provide it, especially given the need to soothe Loyalist bigotry.



The crisis in Ireland today is the crisis of an unresolved National Question. The weakness of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is that it does not deal with this question. The Irish capitalists are unable to claim it as any kind of step towards a united Ireland. Instead they focus in on 'equality of two traditions' in the North - ignoring the fact that the rationale for the foundation of the North and its continued existence is inequality and Unionist supremacy. For their part the British have made it clear that there is to be no challenge to that supremacy. The RUC are to contain and erode the Orange mob but not to confront it, in the hope of gradually winning a measure of acceptance for the deal. Dublin and the SDLP have responsibility for the discrimination and repression without any power to change it.

These are weaknesses in capitalist and imperialist strategy - weaknesses that give a real opportunity to the anti-imperialist movement. But the capitalists have one big advantage - they are putting forward a coherent plan of a new Ireland - partitioned, republicanism smashed, democratic rights suspended, wage cuts, tax hikes, an economy structured around the needs of

multi-nationals, British emergency legislation applying in all 32 Counties and membership of NATO and the U.S. war drive.

This mass of lies is to be supported by one big lie - that there is no alternative. We in People's Democracy believe that a starting point for resistance should be a Forum of Republicans and Socialists, to re-state again the promise of the Easter proclamation 70 years ago, to point out how that proclamation has been betrayed and to redraft a freedom charter for today: the demands of the oppressed - of Irish workers, youth, women, gays, Northern nationalists demanding freedom and independence in a united socialist Ireland.

A Loyalist upsurge which overthrew this deal would leave Dublin looking to further appeasement and further attacks on Nationalists by the British. If Socialists and Republicans unite now they can move to the centre of this struggle and make the collapse of this deal a stepping-stone to Freedom.



# POBLACHT NA H-EIREANN

## THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE

# IRISH REPUBLIC

## TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

**IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN:** In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish Nation must, by its valour and discipline and the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

# THE 1916 PROCLAMATION

# A CHARTER OF FREEDOM FOR IRELAND

John McAnulty.

There is a growing realisation within the Republican and Socialist movements that the Irish revolutionary process is facing a new crossroads. Experience of the day-to-day struggle has ended confusion about the Anglo-Irish deal and exposed the reality of the imperialist offensive it represents. Yet despite a relatively recent mass struggle around the hunger strikes and a significant growth and political development in the republican movement, it is not they but the loyalists who are determining the terms of the debate around the deal.

The main problem is a problem of strategy and policy. The majority of those who identify the national question as a central question have been united around the Republican Movement. But these forces are themselves a minority. Our aim now must be to seek unity with all those involved in struggle against imperialism and to seek alliances with the workers' movement, small farmers, the women's movement, youth and so on. The terms of this alliance, the comprehensive set of demands around which the Irish revolution will move forward again, is what People's Democracy means by its call for a Freedom Charter.

The terms of the Anglo-Irish deal have been analysed elsewhere in this journal. It is clear that the offensive is not based on some overwhelming strength of the imperialist and capitalist forces. In fact the deal is riddled with weakness and ambiguities. Nor is it being imposed on an anti-imperialist movement that has suffered any conclusive defeat. In fact it has emerged from a period in which it led a mass struggle which effectively defeated Britain's 'criminalisation' policy, conferred international legitimacy on the freedom struggle here, led to the emergence of Sinn Fein as a significant electoral force, a growth of its organisation and a serious attempt to develop it as an organised and politically educated leadership of the oppressed.

Yet despite these gains and the relative weakness of the imperialist offensive we are not advancing. Instead the tune is being called by loyalist bigots concerned with minor cosmetic curbs on the open expression of their sectarianism. This is no small problem. Our abstention on this issue can only lead to weakening of the movement and to a lack of preparation for the major physical attacks that both the loyalists and the imperialists are proposing. So what is blocking the advance of the revolutionary struggle?

The fact is that the Republican movement today has organised around itself the vast majority of those who see the National Question as the central issue. This represents a major force in the North - about 40% of the Nationalist population and a significant force (about 5%) in the South. The point is that it is a minority. How is it to become a majority?

The republican movement aims to unite all classes and sectors of Irish society around the demand for freedom and independence.

This was essentially the historic achievement of the 1916 proclamation - the 'freedom charter' that made the modern struggle for independence possible. But the proclamation was drawn up hurriedly and obscured many class antagonisms. Since 1916 these antagonisms have developed apace. Now we have a modern capitalist class leading a political and economic offensive against Irish workers and wedded to the interests of imperialism.

1916 cannot happen again. Now we need a thoroughgoing unity between the Republicans and the workers' movement that will fight both the imperialists and our local quislings. The history of today's struggle shows that this can be done. At crucial points - Bloody Sunday, the H-Block/Armagh struggle - the mass of Irish workers in the 26 Counties have moved behind the struggle and completely changed its character. This support has however been based on a general sympathy for the struggle in the North rather than an understanding of the combined nature of the struggle against imperialism.

We in the anti-imperialist movement need to develop that understanding also. We need to look for unity in action, by actively supporting struggles against austerity and cuts with the understanding that any struggle of this kind objectively has an anti-imperialist character. We need to discuss with workers to develop concrete demands for the struggle; we need to generalise through discussion the lessons of individual struggles to produce global demands that have relevance for all workers and we need to refine these into specific demands that directly challenge the imperialist domination of our country and native capitalist collaboration within this domination.

Our own initial proposals for a freedom charter are given at the end of this article. We want to see proposals from other parties, campaign groups, trade unionists and all those struggling against oppression. Ideally these would come together in a mass convention of the Irish people to agree a freedom charter and map out the onward march of the Irish revolution.

Right now we need unity and openness. We need to show a willingness to start now broad discussions around a freedom charter. We need to demonstrate in action what that means: by going to trade union activists fighting the cuts, women opposing the shoddy manipulation of their rights in the divorce tussle with the Church, youth fighting for a future. Above all we need to look to these allies in presenting our own case, and fight to bring it into the trade unions and community groups, exposing the misery and oppression caused by the British occupation in the North and the way in which the Anglo-Irish deal has given Irish capitalism a direct responsibility and complicity in it.

The 1916 proclamation today is still so powerful a case for the legitimacy of the Irish Freedom struggle that the Dublin Government was afraid to commemorate it. It deserves to be commemorated - to be shouted from the rooftops and used to dissolve the hypocrisy and collaboration of Irish society today. But we need to develop that message - a new freedom charter that recognises the sell-out of the capitalists, the new weight of the Irish working class and unites the vast majority of the oppressed in a march to victory and independence.

## OUR PROPOSALS

**BRITS OUT** - Immediate withdrawal of all British military forces and disarming and disbandment of the RUC, UDR and of 'Heavy gangs' and 'Task forces' within the Gardaí.

**END REPRESSION** - Immediate disbandment of all special courts established to 'streamline' justice for the state, repeal of all repressive laws and an end to special procedures such as the use of paid informer evidence.

**SCRUB THE NATIONAL DEBT** - Refuse crippling repayments to the world bank and begin a plan of state investment to build an independent economic base.

**NATIONALISE THE MULTI-NATIONALS** - end the massive tax, rates and grants subsidy to the multi-national firms paid by Irish workers - hold the resources to develop employment within a national plan.

**END DISCRIMINATION** - Outlawing of discrimination by creed or sex. For a programme of affirmative action to redress the mass discrimination against catholic workers in the North and women and minority groups throughout Ireland.

**NO IMPERIALIST ALLIANCES** - No to NATO and the EEC, and to 'Star Wars' - For a policy of solidarity with the oppressed and those fighting for independence throughout the world.

# PD LEADS THE WAY IN LIMERICK

Joe Harrington was elected as a PD councillor to Limerick Corporation in June 1985 coming second in the four seat ward. One of the main issues on which Joe's campaign was based was the need for a fighting working class response to Government austerity measures. This need was exposed quite sharply during the campaign of opposition to government imposed service charges on corporation and county councils throughout the 26 counties.

These charges, a form of double and back door taxation, have been the centre of controversy since they were introduced over three years ago. So widespread and successful has the opposition to their imposition been that a financial crisis now exists in nearly all local authorities in the South. Of course the failure to collect these taxes has led to the familiar cry of 'service charges or jobs must go' by the various councils.

As part of our experience in tackling these questions we reproduce below a submission by Joe Harrington to the Finance Committee of Limerick Corporation on local government finance.

Joe's experience since his election to that body has been that, if Limerick is anything to judge by, local authorities act merely as rubber stamps in carrying out Government policy: the particular government policy of substituting bogus service charges for increased central taxation revenue is a matter which all anti-imperialist public representatives need to co-operate on. It is in this spirit that we reproduce Joe Harrington's document.

Limerick People's Democracy.

*Submission on Local Authority Financing by  
Councillor Joe Harrington.*

*109, O'Malley Park.*

*November 11th 1985*

*The deep economic crisis forms the backdrop to the current discussions on methods of financing Local Government in Ireland. In this discussion People's Democracy, as a socialist organisation, has three priorities. Firstly, we totally oppose any further cutbacks in public services and employment. Secondly, we oppose any attempts to increase the tax burden already borne by working class people. And finally, we call for local services to be improved in line with the real needs of the people, especially those in the most disadvantaged areas, in consultation with the people of those areas themselves and their representative organisations.*

*We outline these aims in order to establish that what is involved is not simply an abstract debate on different forms of Local Government but one which takes place in the context of an austerity offensive against working class people, the stated aim of which is increased profit margins at the expense of workers.*

*Given the present financial situation and, in particular, the national debt, it is clear that, having no intention of taxing big business, multi-national corporations or the large farmers, the government will either implement massive cutbacks in services and employment in the public sector as suggested recently by Dr. Fitzgerald or will attempt to tax the PAYE sector even more heavily through additional taxes. Indeed the present government may well even attempt both of those approaches. It is likely that the Local Authorities will become the focus for this battle and, indeed, the arguments that local services must be paid for, that public services must be self-financing to avoid possible redundancies, may be seen as part of a softening up process for future confrontations.*

*We do not accept the argument that Local Authorities must raise taxes or implement cutbacks. The many arguments that 'local government must be paid for', that 'there are no more free lunches' and so on, ignore the fact that very well-heeled sectors of Irish society are having a very good free lunch at the expense of hundreds of thousands of working class families up and down the country. Working class people cannot pay more and they will not pay more.*

*The fight against the Water Tax is proof positive of this. The PAYE sector saw the imposition of charges clearly for what they were i.e. another form of taxation in disguise. Since 1979 a campaign of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people has been waged against unjust and inequitable taxation. The government's attempt to take from householders what they lacked in courage to take from pay packets was well and truly exposed in the statewide campaign against Service Charges.*

*In this overall context we have big reservations about the local property tax as proposed in the NESC report. As socialists we have no principled objection to a tax on property especially if such a tax is progressive and falls most heavily on large property holders. However, such a tax should be considered as a supplement to a tax reform which decisively shifts the tax burden on to the shoulders of those who can afford it... the big business sector, the multi-nationals, the big farmers and the rich. Outside of such an overall reform it seems likely to us that a local property tax could be either another tax on workers or more likely a device for allowing the government to divest itself of its responsibility for providing a basic level of services throughout the country and to force Local Authorities to implement anti-working class cuts or taxes.*

*The other main proposal presently under discussion is a system of direct block grants from central government to the local authorities, with discretionary powers. In our view this proposal suffers from the disadvantage that it gives the Central Government sole power to determine the level of spending and, by the same token, the power to implement cutbacks by reducing the level of each year's grants.*



Joe Harrington [centre] following his election victory.

*It is our belief that local councils should refuse to make any further cutbacks and should begin to work and plan for the extension of local services in consultation with local people in the trade unions, tenants and residents' associations, unemployed groups, consumer groups etc. There should be much more direct consultations between the Corporation and the various community groups in working out the needs of a particular area. Where necessary, Corporation officials should be made available to help organisations draw up their own submissions, especially at Estimates time.*

*In the case of Limerick City Council this would mean demanding that the government provide the money to finance the demand for expansion of services that would inevitably result. The social needs of many areas of the city require a massive injection of funds to make up for years of neglect.*

*Even a return to the level of local government financing of 1979 would mean a large scale restoration of services given the appalling level of cutbacks that have already taken place due to the austerity drives of successive pro-capitalist governments. We make this demand as the very minimum demand that this Local Authority should make on the government. Index-linking local government finances, backdated to their 1979 level, would still be an inadequate method of financing local authorities but even this would be an improvement on the situation we have in 1985.*

*To finance this the government must be pushed to tax the wealthy. Indeed, the fight for expansion of public services is closely linked to the fight for tax reform and job creation presently being conducted by the Trade Unions. If councillors want to represent the majority of their constituents - the PAYE worker and the jobless - then they must become a key part in this campaign. At the end of the day, the successful financing of Local Authorities will depend on a thoroughgoing reform of the present lopsided taxation system. Without a radical overhaul of the system property tax and block grants can*

*only mean either more taxes on working class people or cuts in services and jobs.*

#### Proposals

*1) Limerick City Council rejects all further cuts in public services and employment, refuses to implement such cuts and calls upon the government to restore the level of funding to its 1979 level, index linked to take account of inflation. This level should be the minimum level of finance available for this and other local authorities.*

*2) Limerick City Council undertakes a plan for the expansion of its services both to alleviate the hardships caused to working class people by the government's cutbacks and the economic crisis and to provide new jobs.*

*3) Limerick City Council supports the campaign of the ICTU on tax equity and job creation and demands that the burden of the taxation system be borne by the best off and the large corporations.*

*4) Limerick City Council puts the needs of working class people and the deprived sectors of the community before book balancing exercises. Therefore any proposals on property tax should be evaluated as part of an overall tax reform package, to be steeply progressive and to be implemented only with a government guarantee of maintenance of funding to local authorities at their 1979 level. Block grants with more discretion at local level as to how the money is spent is acceptable only if a minimum level of financing based on the 1979 level is assured. In the absence of such a guaranteed floor level, Limerick City Council considers a system of block grants could become a charter for the implementation of cutbacks.*

*Cllr. Joe Harrington*

# SOUTH AFRICA



## THE

# DEVELOPING REVOLUTION

The intensification of the political struggle and the rapid rise and politicisation of the black trade union movement are the twin foci of the developing South African revolution. An understanding of the dynamic of each and the relationship between these two components is essential to any understanding of the political situation in present day South Africa.

## 1. POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Among the many political parties of opposition today in South Africa the AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC) is the oldest and most firmly established. It originated in 1912 and steadfastly pursued a non-violent path in its resistance to apartheid for almost five decades. Initially based among the black middle class it did not demand a universal franchise until 1943. In 1956 it adopted the Freedom Charter as its political programme; The Freedom Charter calls for a national-democratic revolution in line with the Communist Party's strategy of a 'Popular Front' which seeks to unite the working class and some pro-capitalist forces around a common political programme. Only after its banning in 1960 - along with the imprisonment of many of its leaders - did the ANC include armed struggle in its arsenal of weapons. It is allied with the Communist Party (CP) and some overlap exists among the leadership. Although the ANC enjoys the largest following of any political current in South Africa it has neither controlled nor led the numerous protests that have shaken the nation during the past 18 months.

In 1983, sparked by the white minority government's decision to include a token representation of Asians and Coloured in Parliament (but no Africans) two coalitions emerged to protest this new affront to particular and apartheid in general. The largest of the two, the UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT (UDF) has attracted the affiliation of over 600 organisations ranging from Trade Unions to community groups with a membership totalling over 1.5 million. It is non-racial and multi-class including pro capitalist organisations within its ranks. Ideologically, the UDF has taken up a sympathetic posture toward the ANC, identifying with the Freedom Charter.

To the left and smaller than the UDF stands the NATIONAL FORUM including seven unions, CUSA (see below), and AZAPO, the Azanian People's Organisation, which was initiated in 1978 following the proscription of the Black Consciousness movement. Like its predecessor it has chosen to exclude white participation although there has been considerable internal debate about this. Unlike the UDF the NF calls for socialism. It insists on the nationalisation of the land and workers' control of the means of production. In opposition to the CP and ANC, it argues for the 'formation of a united front of workers' organisations in direct opposition to any popular front strategy'.

## 2. TRADE UNIONS

Although the trade unions have never been proscribed in

South Africa, they were denied formal recognition until 1979. Since then the trade union movement has mushroomed so that today it represents a formidable challenge to the Apartheid system. In 1969 there were 16,000 Black Union members; in 1975 40,000; and in 1984, 550,000. Now there are 700,000 members spanning virtually all of the key sectors of the economy. Individual unions have augmented their power by joining together into federations.

The FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS (FOSATU) coalesced in 1979 as a non-racial (although overwhelmingly black) federation and has been rooted in powerful unions, including those in the auto, metal, food, transport and textile industries. Although not allied with any political party, nor with the UDF or NF, it has gone on record in support of the creation of a workers' movement to lead the political struggle. FOSATU's first general secretary, Joe Foster, explained the organisation's position in the following terms: 'Workers need their own organisation to

'Workers need their own organisation to counter the growing power of capital and to protect and further their own interests in the wide society'.

He criticised the ANC as a 'popular front' and added:

'To the major western powers it has to appear anti-racist but not as anti-capitalist. For the socialist East it has to appear at least neutral in the superpower struggle and certainly it could not appear to offer a serious socialist alternative to that of those countries, as the response to Poland's Solidarity illustrates.

A second federation the COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICAN UNIONS (CUSA) was founded in 1980 by the unions in disagreement with FOSATU over the role of white members. CUSA, under the influence of the Black Consciousness movement, emphasises the importance of an exclusively black leadership. CUSA has affiliated with both the National Forum and the United Democratic Front but has been excluded from COSATU, a new 'super federation' of trade unions which was formed at the end of 1985, because of its exclusion of whites.

The newly formed CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS (COSATU), represents 500,000 workers. In addition to FOSATU, it includes as its largest single member the National Union of Mineworkers which alone has approximately 200,000 members and whose vice-president, Elijah Barahi, is the new federation's new leader. The formation of COSATU has created a new situation, drastically altering the face of the trade union movement. The founding conference of COSATU was a major step towards unity, and more than a symbolic one. But now in the superfederation very important organisational and political questions are going to have to be debated and decided.

The relationship between the rise of the political and trade union movements is a close one and the future development of the South African revolution depends on the successful fusion of these two components. People's Democracy offers the following discussion taken from the theoretical Marxist Review 'International Outlook' as a contribution to the understanding of this developing process.

PADDY MACKEN

\* \* \*

*The following is a four-way discussion among South African revolutionists and anti-apartheid activists in Britain. The discussion took place in London in November 1985.*

*Bob Fine, co-author of 'A Question of Solidarity - Independent Trade Unions in South Africa', had recently returned from a four week visit to South Africa. He discussed his impressions and ideas with Charlie Van Gelderen, a veteran South African Trotskyist now living in Britain; a Black South African revolutionist, a sympathiser of the Cape Action League, identified below as X; and Martin Thomas, editor of Socialist Organiser, a socialist newspaper published in London*

**BOB FINE:** My main impression, from the trade unionists that I met - in the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU); in the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union; in the General Workers' Union (GWU); and others - was the depth of workers' concern with trade-union democracy. (1)

As the new labor federation [embracing FOSATU, National Union of Mineworkers, and a number of other unions] becomes a possibility, workers are discussing ways in which they will be able to extend the democratic structures that already exist into the new federation.

A lot of workers drew a close link between the structures of democracy in their own unions and wider questions of democratic organisation inside South Africa. So, for example one of the ways in which workers would address the character of the United Democratic Front (UDF) - (2) is to ask: what structures does the UDF have? To whom are the leaders accountable? What kind of education does the UDF provide for its members? What possibility is there of recall of their officials?

**CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN:** I read a report of a UDF meeting where a Black trade unionist asked the question: How do we know if you get into power that what's going to happen here is not what has happened in other parts of Africa?

**FINE:** I heard that as well, a number of times. The question of the relationship between democracy and socialism is often raised. There were a number of discussions in the trade-union educational about nationalisation. The Freedom Charter [of the African National Congress] - (3) has a clause which doesn't exactly call for nationalisation, but is along those lines - ownership by the people of the monopolies.

The trade unionists asked themselves the question: What has nationalisation got to do with socialism, unless nationalisation also means democratic control of industry by workers? There is strong emphasis within the trade-union educational on workers' control in industry.

The problem of Eastern Europe also came up a lot. A lot of workers had followed the progress and defeat of Solidar Solidarnosc - there were a lot of articles in the trade union newspapers - and there was a strong belief that socialism without free trade unions was a contradiction in terms.

**X:** How widespread is this discussion? Is it confined to the top layers, the leaders, the shop stewards, or do you find it at the shop-floor level?

**FINE:** My impression is that the discussion is not just among leaders. It percolates further than that...The education is much broader than trade-union education here. All kinds of political issues are taken up. But there's no attempt to counterpose directly the politics being established within the trade unions to the politics of the ANC or orthodox nation nationalism. There's an implicit counterposing, but no explicit counterposing.

#### AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

**VAN GELDEREN:** Can we move on to the question of the ANC? The impression I get is that though the ANC is not necessarily leading what is happening in the townships, the people there feel inspired by the ANC and look to the ANC, either directly or through the UDF.

**FINE:** Yes. The symbols of the ANC are very powerful: 'Free Mandela,' Freedom Charter, the colors of the ANC. I found a lot of people in the unions who supported the UDF, and many of those support the ANC.

But it's an odd kind of support. It's almost: 'Here's a collection of symbols, and we'll give those symbols our own content. 'No one really knows precisely what the ANC stands for.

In some areas there is a lot of fluidity between the UDF and the unions. In Natal, both the UDF and the unions face a common threat from Buthelezi's Inkatha movement. (4)

The main point is that workers in the unions will adopt one form of politics or another. And at present there are basically three places you can go: the UDF/ANC circle, Black Consciousness (5) in one form or another (which a sizeable minority of workers do), or in Natal a lot of workers belong to Inkatha. The trade union movement as such does not have a political voice.

The lack of an independent workers' voice is becoming much more apparent.

**X:** How much National Forum presence is there in the unions? (6)

**FINE:** There is a presence, especially in Johannesburg. Talking to workers at the educationals there I found that many support Black Consciousness. And I think that some of the very top FOSATU officials in that area are pretty sympathetic to the National Forum. I think the overwhelming political presence, though, for better or worse, is the UDF.

### A WORKERS' PARTY?

**FINE:** I met almost on one who thought that a workers' party was an immediate possibility. A lot of people felt that they were in a political vacuum. A lot of people were saying, 'We have to do something political,' but were not happy with the options available. On the other hand - and this leads to a kind of paralysis - there's a notion that it's impossible to set up an alternative to the ANC - the symbols of the ANC are too strong, the tradition is too strong. To try to take on the ANC would be big trouble.

Also, within the trade union movement there is a very strong current which doesn't give top priority to the question of a party. Top priority is building a trade union movement. I suppose there is a syndicalist element there, which says that the party is important but it can wait - it is always something for a future date.

So in the place where the best human resources for the building of a workers' party are to be found, a lot of those resources are still directed to the trade union movement and not toward a party.

The question of a workers' party is on the agenda, and ought to become more explicitly on the agenda. But there is a danger of a kind of substitutionism. The trade unions at the moment are not willing to go down that road, but it seems to me that either a workers' party will come out of the trade union movement, or it will not come out at all.

**VAN GELDEREN:** Yes, there is a danger of syndicalism, especially in the General Workers' Union, which seems to be much inclined toward a simple position of just building up trade union strength, rather than building a political party. But how do the trade unions relate to the community organisations?

**FINE:** The trade unions' relation to community organisations is entirely different in different parts of the country. In Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape, relations are disastrous. Trade unionists are fingered as collaborators. When there was a call for a general strike in that area for one day - from Boesak [of the UDF] I think it was - the unions objected. They said you can't just call on workers to do things - it's the workers who decide, not a call from on high.

In other areas relations are much better. In some areas community organisations are based in the unions.

I think the most advanced notion coming out of FOSATU is 'transformative politics'. This means that the structures built up by trade unions in the workplaces - i.e. solid democratic, grass-roots structures - should be extended into the community, so that for the next period of time the unions can be involved in building community organisations.

Also, that the kind of politics that unions engage in in the workplace - the posing of demands on immediate questions: the right of access to workers, better wages, better conditions, end to discrimination against women - should be extended from the workplace to the community.

The idea is that in this way the unions will be able to develop a solid base in the community as a step toward developing their own political voice. The problem, of course, is that the development of community organisations is not a substitute for the development of a party.

### FOSATU AND INDEPENDENT POLITICS

**X:** Joe Foster of FOSATU made a very good speech in 1982 about the need for independent working class politics. But what worries me is that I don't see any effort by FOSATU since then to carry those ideas forward. It looks like a project abandoned by FOSATU.

**FINE:** I think you're right. The speech was out on a limb, and very little has been done to turn it into reality. FOSATU was dragged into politics by the rapidly escalating events ..... in particular by the politicisation of its own members.

**VAN GELDEREN:** I think the difficulties in the way of a workers' party in a way are analogous to the situation here [in Great Britain], where the immediate feeling among workers is to get rid of Thatcher. There the feeling is to get rid of apartheid and the ANC represents the main force, like the Labour Party does here, for the immediate task.

**FINE:** Yes. One of the things I learned there was the strength of the ANC's appeal. In a way the analogy with the Labour Party is a good one - to the extent that we have to understand the strength of the Labour tradition here, and also the ANC tradition has important strengths which we need to understand if we're going to relate to it adequately.

**X:** The ANC has very strong symbols. But are these symbols

Well-armed police survey the bodies of black demonstrators, victims of the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960. In all, 69 Africans were killed and 178 wounded when police opened fire. The massacre shocked the world, and convinced many of the regime's internal opponents that only armed struggle would bring real change in South Africa.





visible to the population as a whole? Or just to the urban population? And not everyone in the urban population, but only the educated people, the ones who read newspapers?

I think the process by which the ANC is becoming visible to everybody is the mass funerals. The majority of the people at those funerals have come to bury a friend, a relative, a member of the community. But during the funeral - through the ANC colours draped on the coffin and so on - they are brought into contact with the ANC. The majority of these people will be people who do not read newspapers.

**FINE:** I don't know. My impression is that the ANC's popular appeal is growing very rapidly. The organisations that are going to come out of this present period the strongest, most unscathed, are not the ANC organisations but the trade union movement. The problem is to translate that organisation into a political presence.

At the moment everyone feels that power is on the agenda. And who are the trade unions when power is on the agenda? They chip away - better conditions here, a workers' organisation there - but they don't address themselves to the really central questions of power. And the ANC does.

#### WHAT ROAD FOR SOUTH AFRICA?

**VAN GELDEREN:** It seems to me that there are only two roads for South Africa, over five or 10 years. Sooner or later this regime must give way. The most likely thing at the moment is some kind of agreement between the ANC and the white bourgeoisie. The only other alternative is that even the democratic demands of the Freedom Charter can finally be realised only through something completely different - a workers' party.

**FINE:** Part of the problem with the Freedom Charter is that the means are so disconnected from the ends. There's a loosely-defined democratic vision, but that vision is entirely abstracted from any means of getting there. Without some democratic element in the means of getting there, you'll never get democracy.

**MARTIN THOMAS:** There seems to be a contradiction in the way the ANC conducts politics. The immediate slogans put forward are fantastically militant - 'Make South Africa ungovernable,' 'No education before liberation', blank opposition to everything. On the other hand, there they are lobbying governments for sanctions, talking to the capitalists, and so on. And the social program they put forward is in fact very moderate.

The explanation, I think, is that the ANC's vision is not one where a new South Africa will be created by the people taking control: but the role of the mass of the people is just to be disorderly and to put the government in a position where the government then has to negotiate with the ANC. The whole thing takes place over the heads of the people.

This approach has dangers, it seems to me, not only in the long term but also in the short term.

Oliver Tambo [president of the ANC], in an interview with *Newsweek*, said that he could see the downfall of apartheid maybe in 10 years, being optimistic. The perspective of making South Africa ungovernable might be a good tactic if you think that the government is going to fall in a few months: But 10 years?

To pursue that sort of politics cannot but create divisions among your own people: People become exhausted and frustrated by the disorder. The logic of it, despite all the ANC's calls for unity, is to fragment and divide. Which from the point of view of the ANC is not necessarily a bad thing: It ensures that the initiative remains in their hands.

**FINE:** Yes. I don't think the uprisings take place in the townships because the ANC called for them.

They take place because of the extraordinarily difficult conditions that people in the townships face. The problem with the ungovernability slogan is that it does not offer any sense of what a workers' government would consist of.

When the students and the people in the townships throw



NELSON MANDELA

their bodies against the police, the ANC doesn't so much try to organise that as to use it as a bargaining weapon.

#### CAPITALISM NEEDS APARTHEID?

**VAN GELDEREN:** Most of us, myself included, have firmly believed that in South Africa capitalism can't exist without apartheid. I'm not so sure that still holds true today, with more sophisticated industry in South Africa.

The problem, of course, is the mines. The low productivity of Rand ore still demands cheap unskilled labor to make those mines profitable. But they can create a Black aristocracy of labour and still have a mass of unskilled workers on low wages.

**THOMAS:** Isn't it a fact that wages in the gold mines, after declining or stagnating for 80 years, have risen considerably since the early 70s?

It seems to me that the problem for the government, in dismantling some of the special features of South Africa and turning it into a more 'normal' racist capitalism, is not so much some economic impossibility in the abstract as the difficulty of dealing with its base, the white population.

**FINE:** 'Is capitalism possible without apartheid in South Africa?' In a sense it's the wrong question. Theoretically we can argue it until the cows come home. What we have to be warned against is that certainly capitalism without apartheid is what a lot of people are trying to establish. Whether it is, in fact, established will be determined not theoretically but in practical politics.

The Progressive Federal Party (7) and the capitalists are putting forward a definite anti-apartheid position. It's just not pro-socialist and not pro-democratic. They want a kind of federal power-sharing that will guarantee private enterprise.

A lot of people say that the government is just perpetuating the old apartheid system under a slightly new guise. I think that's probably right so far, but if sufficient pressures are put on the government, I wouldn't put it past them to pursue a program of reforms to a point where the major planks of apartheid are eroded.

In its place you'd have a military-bureaucratic dictatorship partially de-racialised, that offers us nothing at all, no improvement on apartheid.

We have to be aware that there are kinds of 'anti-apartheid' that have nothing to do with democracy and nothing to do with socialism.

X: It is in the context of these changes that a workers' party has meaning.

It seems that capitalism in South Africa is capable of de-racialising itself. I'm not happy with the theories that say capitalism is inseparable from apartheid. Theoretically, from

(1) The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) has been the largest of the non-racial (mainly Black) trade union groups that have developed since the early 1970s. It has joined the newly-formed Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

(2) The United Democratic Front (UDF) is a coalition of some 645 organisations, broadly reflecting the politics of the African National Congress.

(3) The African National Congress (ANC) is the main nationalist organisation, dating back to 1912. It has been closely allied with the South African Communist Party.

The Freedom Charter is a manifesto adopted by the ANC and other organisations in 1955, which codified the South African Communist Party's strategy of a 'two-stage revolution.' The first stage posits an alliance with the liberal capitalists in a struggle for democracy. The second stage, the struggle for socialism, is relegated to a future stage.

an abstract point of view, that may be very correct. But in terms of practical day-to-day politics an understanding like that can turn into ultra-leftism, where you do nothing because the struggle is not against capitalism.

It is only through a workers' party that you can have a combined struggle, a permanent revolution. In the context of the changes that are taking place you need a workers' party to defend the workers' interests, to carry on the workers' struggle. You're not going to get socialism overnight. If in the context of these changes the ANC comes into power, either alone or as part of a coalition, you will need a workers' party that will stand in opposition.

(4) Inkatha is a conservative movement, based mainly among Zulus, and led by Gatsha Buthelezi, chief minister of the KwaZulu bantustan in Natal. Inkatha is allied with the Progressive Federal Party.

(5) The Black Consciousness Movement arose during the mid-70s. Influenced by the Black nationalist movement in the United States and Africa, it called on Blacks to unite against the apartheid regime. In recent years many of the Black Consciousness organisations have evolved in a more explicitly anti-capitalist direction. The main exponent of this movement is the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO)

(6) The National Forum is a coalition that includes AZAPO and the left-wing Cape Action League.

(7) The Progressive Federal Party is the main white opposition party, formed in the late 1950s. It is backed by major capitalist interests. It advocates a federal power-sharing system with veto powers for the white minority. It is allied with Inkatha.

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