

**RCG  
pamphlet**

# **IRELAND**

**British Labour and  
British Imperialism**

**25p**

ISBN 0 905400 00 3

First Printing March 1976

Second Printing May 1976

Third Printing October 1976

### **Errata**

p7 4th paragraph, line 3. 'parliamentary' should read 'paramilitary'.

p20 2nd paragraph, line 6. This should read:

'because the working class in Britain has no *independent* voice on Ireland.'

p25 2nd paragraph, line 6. This should read:

'idea that although the state as such is a bourgeois state, . . .'

p28 4th paragraph, line 8. 'majority sections' should read 'a major section'.

# IRELAND: British Labour and British Imperialism

## INTRODUCTION

As socialists we all want to see a socialist solution to the Irish question and we want socialism in this country. The question we have to ask and to answer is: how can we achieve this? We shall show in this pamphlet that only a clear Marxist analysis can answer this question, as Marxism is the only standpoint that can understand capitalist society from a working class point of view and that can show a way forward for workers.

The occupation of the North of Ireland by British troops, and Britain's continuing political domination of the area does not present itself as an example of national oppression in its classical form. But we shall show that Ireland does indeed suffer national oppression at the hands of the British state. This oppression lies at the root of the 'Troubles'—this series of *apparently* senseless and bizarre acts of violence. Although the real problem is the national oppression of Ireland by the British state this has been obscured by the waves of sectarian assassinations, 'random' bombings and violence among and between the Catholic and Protestant communities. The spokesmen of the ruling class can see no further than these appearances. In the Commons debate on the report of the Constitutional Convention report, Sir Nigel Fisher said,

'I accept that they (the UUUC) have a logical democratic argument, but it has never been possible to apply logic to the reactions of Ireland—or of women! Emotions matter much more. Rex Harrison in "My Fair Lady" bewailed, "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" But they are not. It is just as unreal to demand that the Irish should be treated in the same way as the more logical English.' (*Hansard* 12 Jan 1976.) (see back of pamphlet for key to references).

This is the voice of the ruling class, a class which has no understanding of the system which supports it, and over which it presides. It views everything which happens against its wishes as something totally irrational, beyond any 'human'

understanding or control. Its political responses become guided by its instinct for self-preservation. This became evident in the course of the Commons debate, 'I do not see how we can contemplate creating something akin to Angola 20 miles off our own shores, and that is what we would be doing (if Britain withdrew). There are many interests outside Northern Ireland that would be only too willing to go in with money or arms to advance one or other of the causes which would be fighting for control of a Province which we had left without legitimate law or order. That is a situation which not only we but our allies in NATO would view with horror.' (A. J. Beith *Hansard* 12 Jan 1976.)

Unable to actually understand what is going on in Northern Ireland the ruling class does at least grasp what could happen if things don't go their way.

Unfortunately this inability to understand the events in Northern Ireland extends right into the labour movement itself. After some hysterical and frightened comments on the deaths of ten Protestants in Armagh, *Tribune* concluded thus:

'Yet for all the frightening portents does it all add up to the final victory of the madmen over the politicians? Is a full scale civil war now impossible to prevent?

'The answer would have to be an unequivocal "yes" apart from two considerations. First, there is the attitude of the British Government—the thankful refusal to listen either to the clamour for a return to police-state methods or to the pressure for British disengagement from this British-made tragedy.

And there is, too, the attitude of the bulk of the people of Ireland themselves. They are not facing gang war as has been alleged—the gangsters of Chicago killed each other, not innocent passers-by. They are facing "tribal" warfare. But at this moment of outrage there is no doubt that for all the pressures and fears, and all the confidence of the extremists who want to fight it out, ordinary Protestants and Catholics in the Province are as incensed by the violence, and as intent on ending it as anyone this side of the Irish Sea.

'If the British Government continues to hold the ring (!), without surrendering to the extremist demands, the ordinary people may yet see the political options opening up again—but it will be a long, long haul.' (*Tribune* 9 Jan 1976.)

The approach is exactly the same as that of the ruling class—'madmen', 'gangsters', 'tribal extremists', the 'illogical emotional' Irish are at the root of the problem. All the capitalists' favourite demons responsible for working class militancy reappear at work in Ireland—'extremists' versus the 'ordinary' people etc. All of these ideas about the Irish crisis are restricted to the appearance of things.

As socialists we have to see beyond these immediate appearances to uncover the social forces behind them. We cannot start from the vicious sensationalism of the bourgeois press and the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie quoted above. Nor can we start from the positions of the left of the Labour Party, for, as we have seen, their approach is the same as that of the ruling class. But the adoption of this ruling class approach is not restricted to *Tribune*. The *Morning Star* often quotes the slogan 'Sectarianism Kills Workers'. This neither explains what causes sectarianism nor what the working class should do about it. As we pointed out in *Revolutionary Communist* No 2, it is the

'particular historical conditions of Irish social development that have given Protestants and Catholics a different role in society. The peculiar importance and fervour

which is acquired by religion can only be understood on this basis; it is the ideological form in which the battle between oppressed and oppressor has been expressed.' (*Revolutionary Communist* No 2 May 1975 p12.)

This is the sense behind the 'senselessness' of the Irish conflict: we have to find the material roots of the struggle, evaluate the social forces involved and then, on this basis, show a way forward for workers.

Although the struggle in Northern Ireland is, in essence, the same as that waged in, for example, Kenya and Vietnam—the struggle of an oppressed nation to throw off its oppressors—it presents itself differently and has certain specific features which mask its real nature. In Kenya, British troops were quite clearly acting as the armed wing of colonialism and the struggle of the Kenyan liberation forces could be easily recognised as one for national liberation and independence. In Vietnam, on the other hand, the American forces were clearly operating on the soil of an independent nation engaged in a civil war between the anti-imperialist and pro-imperialist groupings. However, in Ireland more than fifty years of partition have obscured the real nature of the conflict there. 'Northern Ireland' is not seen as a colony but as an integral part of the 'United Kingdom'. Thus the army is said to be operating on 'British soil'. Further, the true situation in 1919/20—a majority in favour of national unity and independence, a minority opposed—has been reversed inside the artificial statelet of 'Northern Ireland'. This is why the *Sunday Mirror*, for example, can express outrage at the flying of the Republican flag over Crossmaglen town hall, referring to Crossmaglen as,

'a town as much a part of the UK, as Enfield where Ross McWhirter died.' (*Sunday Mirror* 31 Nov 1975.)

and yet go on to call for the introduction of heavier fire power, more troops, the use of Saladin armoured cars, and the Carl Gustav heavy machine gun—hardly everyday sights in Enfield.

We shall show in this pamphlet that situations such as that in Ireland cannot be understood, nor an independent working class position be developed without an analysis grounded in Marxism. Without such an understanding of what imperialism is or what national oppression is, and how these operate in Ireland, we are forced to fall back on ruling class solutions. Our analysis will show that the root of the problem has been, and still is, the political domination of Ireland by the British state. Only this understanding can lay the basis for a working class solution. We shall see that lacking such an analysis, the policy of the CPGB and Labour left MPs cannot challenge British imperialism because it accepts a solution within a Northern Ireland ruled by Britain. In Ireland this policy, far from bringing democracy to the North, leaves it wide open for the British state to impose yet another regime of law and order: the 'law' of the Special Powers Act and the 'order' of Unionist violence and intimidation. In Britain, such a policy reinforces the worst traditions of the labour movement. The ruling class will be free to play on age old prejudices to divide and disarm the working class in the face of this 'foreign' threat. The call will go out for unity 'in the national interest' against the 'common threat'. The real danger for the working class is this: if it accepts ruling class 'law and order' for the Irish, it cannot oppose such rule for itself in Britain. In the present crisis it is crucial, above all else,

that the working class asserts its own independent interests and fights for its own policies—policies different from, and opposed to ruling class policy. This is as true for the problem of Ireland, as it is for questions such as unemployment, inflation and social expenditure cuts. The recent acceptance of 8,500 redundancies by Chrysler workers is only the latest example of the setbacks which the working class is suffering in the present crisis, setbacks which flow directly from the widespread acceptance of the national interest argument.

As we shall show, the only practical way forward which defends the interests of both the Irish and the British working class is the immediate withdrawal of British troops from the North and the immediate recognition of the right of the Irish to determine their own future. But first we will have to examine the historical and political background to the present conflict. We also need to restate and understand the nature of imperialism and its specific operation in Ireland. In this way, and *only* in this way, can we arrive at the correct independent policy for the British working class on the question of Ireland.

#### THE NORTHERN IRELAND STATELET

In the six counties which form the present statelet of 'Northern Ireland', there exists bitter hostility between the Protestant and Catholic communities. Discrimination against Catholics is well known; here are some examples. *Local government election boundaries* were skilfully gerrymandered. In Derry City where there is an anti-Unionist majority, the three wards, each returning eight councillors were arranged in 1966 so that a Unionist majority is returned as shown in the table below:

	Anti-Unionist Voters	Unionist Voters
Waterside Ward	2,804	4,420
North Ward	3,173	4,380
South Ward	14,125	1,474
Total Derry	20,102	10,274

Result: a majority of Unionist representatives.

This form of control of local government had as its result discrimination in *housing provision* and *public employment*. County Fermanagh with a majority Catholic population built 1,589 council houses between the war and 1969. 1,021 were occupied by Protestant tenants and 568 by Catholic tenants. Of 370 County Council employees, only 32 (9%) were Catholic.

There is also an extreme degree of discrimination in *private employment* as the 1971 Census shows.

Electoral Ward	% Catholic	% Male Unemployment
<i>Belfast</i>		
Falls Road	79.6	23.8
Shankill Road	7.8	11.3
<i>Derry</i>		
North Ward	43.5	11.4
South Ward	82.1	26.7

In the three largest Belfast firms, the proportion of Catholics employed is 3%, 1.4% and 0% respectively. Civil liberties, taken for granted in Britain have been absent throughout the entire period of the partition of Ireland. For example, the Special Powers Act, first introduced in 1922 allowed the police to:

- arrest and search without warrant
- deny trial by jury
- prevent access to those imprisoned without trial
- prohibit the circulation of any newspaper
- prohibit the holding of an inquest after a prisoner's death

Why does this situation exist, and why has it persisted for more than half a century? Only if we can explain this can we understand the tasks facing the labour movement in Britain in relation to the Irish question.

The labour movement's reaction to the Irish question has in general, fallen back on instinctive reactions—ranging from calls to 'Stamp out the IRA' through to the call for a 'Bill of Rights'—instead of taking up a carefully and clearly thought out strategy. It is therefore necessary to examine all the important aspects of the Irish question from an objective standpoint, so as to locate the fundamental cause of the present situation. Only then can we be confident that our policy is clearly thought through and that it accords with the interests of the working class movement.

It has become all too fashionable these days for self-styled 'Marxists' to treat political questions in isolation from their material base in capitalist society. We find political conflict and ideology torn from their connection with class society. When this happens any policy can emerge, and be argued for, since the limits of action no longer depend on the realities of class society but on the observer's own judgement of interests and motives. And when this happens, the course of action mapped out is not based on a clear and realistic appraisal of the problem, but upon the authors own fears and prejudices—a sure recipe for disaster.

We can only make sense of the Irish question by going behind the deceptive surface appearances of the problem and seeking the root of the present conflict in the relation between classes in Ireland, the uneven development of capitalism in Ireland, and in the imperialist relationship between Britain and Ireland.

## **The Limits of Democracy under Capitalism**

The degree of civil, political and religious freedom which exists within any country does not depend simply on the good or ill will of that country's ruling class. The crucial factor is how much this freedom threatens the continued expansion of capitalism. Since capitalism can only grow by accumulating profits, the extent of democracy depends on the conditions for profit-making in any country. In the developed capitalist countries of Western Europe, Japan, and the United States, the high productivity of labour in the postwar period meant that for a period of time, profits could be made even though wages and the standard of living of the working class might rise. Because of this, a strong trade union movement could be tolerated by the ruling classes of these countries. The strength of parliamentary democracy and the relative freedom enjoyed by the labour and trade union movement in the advanced countries during this period rests on the temporary prosperity that capital enjoyed at that time, and which is now coming to an end.

The relative freedom presently enjoyed by the labour movement in the advanced countries contrasts with the wholesale political repression in the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In no part of the backward capitalist world does democracy exist.

Economically backward, with a much lower level of labour productivity, it's generally impossible to reconcile profit making with continuous increases in the real living standards of the working class. In most of these countries the trade union movement is confronted with tremendous legal restrictions; in some it has to operate illegally. It is the difficulty experienced in profit making which explains the existence of one-party states, dictatorships, and military rule which characterises many of these states.

In the North of Ireland, we have to look for the cause of the lack of democracy in the backwardness of capitalism in that area relative to that of Britain and the world economy.

At the turn of the century, the only major industry in Ireland was concentrated in the North East corner predominantly around Belfast. The engineering and shipbuilding industries had developed as a result of the development and expansion of the linen industry in the last half of the nineteenth century. They depended for their markets on the existence of the British Empire. Most of their production was exported. Because of this relationship to the world market, the North-East (and the Unionist capitalists) were extraordinarily vulnerable to the development of competition from foreign capitals. This competition emerged and grew strong in the early years of this century, receiving its fullest expression in the First World War, as rival capitalists waged war for the control of areas of investment of raw material resources and markets worldwide to maintain profit levels.

Many British industries came under the pressures of foreign competition for the first time. So did the three main industries in the North East of Ireland. Alternative kinds of textiles were substituting for linen; the shipbuilding industry all but collapsed in the immediate post-war period; and the US and Germany now had developed engineering industries taking substantial shares of the world

market. The older industry established in the north of Ireland had a lower level of labour productivity than elsewhere. For the northern capitalists, the struggle to preserve profits demanded privileged access to the relatively sheltered markets of the British Empire as well as an attack on the living standards of the working class.

### **The Partition of Ireland**

The intensification of international capitalist competition coincided with the intensification of the struggle of the Irish people for freedom from British domination. Ireland has been wholly or partly under direct British rule for some 800 years. Throughout the entire period struggles against British rule have taken place. The most serious and important of these occurred in the period during and since the French revolution. Every generation of the Irish people have witnessed a renewed outbreak of this struggle.

In the early years of this century the agitation for home rule for Ireland reached a crescendo. The Liberal Party came to power in 1906 and promised Home Rule in order to prevent the substantial Irish nationalist minority in the House of Commons from opposing a Liberal Government. By 1910, the Liberal Government was completely dependent upon the support of the Nationalists and of the Labour Party to pass its programme in Parliament. The Liberals introduced the 1911 Parliament Act which meant that the House of Lords (overwhelmingly Tory) could no longer completely block laws passed by the House of Commons. The British ruling class felt itself threatened—from growing labour representation in Parliament, from the Liberals' welfare reforms and the weakening of the House of Lords, and finally from the loss of parliamentary support from Unionist MPs that would follow the granting of Home Rule to Ireland.

The Tories found ready allies in the northern capitalist class, who feared the loss of Empire markets. These Unionists, who wanted to preserve the union between Britain and Ireland, organised a parliamentary army to defend the link with Britain. This organisation, the 'Ulster Volunteer Force', had 80,000 men under arms. It received £1,000,000 from Belfast capitalists. Rudyard Kipling gave £30,000, while Lord Rothschild, Lord Iveagh and the Duke of Bedford each gave £10,000. The UVF were given a suite of offices in Belfast Town Hall and received training from British army officers. Army officers, stationed at the Curragh refused to fight against the creation of a separate Ulster statelet. The Liberals backed down, merely promising Home Rule with the temporary exclusion of Ulster, the Bill to come onto the Statute Book at the end of the war.

In the first general election held after the war, the result in Ireland was an overwhelming victory for nationalist candidates who won 75 out of the 103 parliamentary seats. Declaring a separate Republican parliament, they organised the government of the country in place of the British administration. The British government attempted to prevent the new Irish government from functioning. When this failed, they responded with a wave of repression. The notorious Black and Tans sacked 18 towns, carried out brutal terrorist operations and tortured indiscriminately. The city of Cork was burned and looted and fire hoses were cut by British troops. The report of the subsequent enquiry was

suppressed by the British government but the Labour Party concluded:

'Things are being done in the name of Britain which must make her name stink in the nostrils of the whole world.' (*Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland* (1921).)

The bitter and bloody war of independence only served to confirm the result of the ballot box: the Irish did not want to continue under British rule. Irish representatives began negotiations with the British government. The treaty which was agreed to included many concessions short of full independence for the Irish. In particular, it confirmed the partition of Ireland decreed by the British Government two years earlier when six north-eastern counties were declared to constitute the artificial statelet of 'Northern Ireland'.

Since the northern capitalists clearly saw that their profits could only be made by remaining within the British Empire, they fought vigorously to keep the island politically divided. Connolly had warned that the partition of Ireland

'would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured.' (*Connolly* p53.)

The carnival of reaction set in: south of the border, civil war broke out between those who supported and those who opposed the treaty; in the North the infamous Special Powers Act was introduced, together with the formation of the notorious Special Constabulary. The fragile unity of the young Irish labour movement was destroyed. Workers at Harland and Wolff, having driven Catholics from the yards, dropped their claim for a 44 hour week. Engineering workers accepted cuts in pay when two years earlier they had been in the forefront of the struggle for shorter hours and higher wages. Protestant carpenters scabbed on a national strike against wage cuts.

### **Sectarianism and the Protestant Working Class**

Thus was bloodily born 'Northern Ireland': a police state with a special state para-military force to protect it against attempts to combine it with the rest of Ireland. The labour movement was divided so deeply that it effectively ceased to have any independent existence. The crushing of democracy an achievement vital to the survival of the northern capitalist class had been brought about not *in spite* of opposition from the working class movement in the north-eastern counties, but *because* of the support of a section of the working class for partition. This is a truth which the facts of history bear out, and which has to be recognised. No amount of pious calls for unity can wipe away the fact that this statelet, existing only through the denial of democracy, was born and has been sustained through its lifetime by a majority section of the working class in the North. How could such a setback come about?

If a capitalist ruling class is to win the support for its policies, it must be able to mobilise a powerful section of the population behind it. Since these policies are usually directed against the working class, the capitalists generally have to rely on the fury of sections of the middle class to do their work for them. But if it is possible to divide the working class, to get one section to accept ruling class policy whilst another rejects it, then the capitalists are in a very powerful position. The capitalist state, its courts, its police force and its army no longer

have to do capital's dirty work, incurring the risk of direct opposition from the working class—instead a section of the working class does the capitalists' job for them. It no longer appears that the root cause of the problems of the working class is capitalism but race, or nation, or, as in Ulster, religion.

But how can the ruling class win the support of a whole section of the working class in this way? How is it that the Protestant section of the northern working class sees a unity with the capitalists who exploit them as being more advantageous than unity with their fellow Catholic workers? Connolly explained this division in terms of the Protestant workers' privileged position relative to that of the Catholics:

'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 hardly 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 towards the Catholics is but a glorified representation on a big stage of the same passions inspired by the same unworthy motives.' (Connolly p40.)

The Protestant section of the working class occupied the skilled positions in Belfast industry and were the first hired and last fired. Although their conditions would inspire no envy from the workers of Britain, the relative security of employment which they experienced compared with that of the Catholics enabled them to endure the squalor of Belfast slums and sweatshops, to move beyond the bare existence experienced by the lowly paid unskilled Catholic workers, who were only infrequently employed. The loyalist workers were prepared to fight tooth and nail to maintain this privileged security. In the absence of a developed all-Irish socialist movement which could point to the real alternative advantages offered by socialism as well as championing national freedom, it is no wonder that they remained under the influence of the reactionary pro-imperialist leadership of the Unionist capitalist class.

### **Unity—but what kind of unity?**

Any political argument about the Irish question that fails to take the basis of this division into account will only resort to platitudes and generalities about the Irish working class. These may make fine-sounding rhetoric, but they hide and mystify the real situation in Ireland, thereby misleading the working class both in Britain and in Ireland. As Connolly scornfully remarked:

'the doctrine that because the workers of Belfast live under the same industrial conditions as do those of Great Britain, they are therefore subject to the same passions and to be influenced by the same methods of propaganda, is a doctrine almost screamingly funny in its absurdity.' (Connolly p41.)

It might seem obvious that we should approach each particular political problem with some care, understanding its particular features in order to arrive at a concrete solution, instead of rushing in with ready-made formulas. Yet this is one of the weaknesses of the British labour movement's response to the Irish question. It sees sectarianism, but instead of asking what the root of that sec-

tarianism is and how the roots of the division amongst the workers can be torn out, it simply calls for unity. Unless we grasp what is at the root of disunity it will be impossible to create unity. We have seen that the basis of disunity is to be found in the privileges of the Protestant working class, privileges which have been dependent upon the maintenance of both the link with Britain and the partition of Ireland.

Partition was a direct result of the struggle of Ulster capitalists to keep their industry profitable, using the markets of the British Empire. In a pamphlet published in 1921, immediately before partition, the Communist Party acknowledged that industry in the north was dependent upon maintaining the British link:

'The linen and engineering products of the North are not sold in any quantity in the Irish market. These are, in the main, exported to those markets which are in the protection and domination of the Union Jack. Thus, the economic interests of the capitalists of Ulster are inseparably entwined with the imperialist interests of Great Britain. The economic needs of the predominating political groups of the North are identical with the needs of British finance-capital.' (Paul p.3.)

Given this fact it is obvious why Protestant workers should see their immediate interest served by keeping 'Ulster' within the United Kingdom. Yet the present General Secretary of the CP would have us believe that this immediate interest does not exist and has not existed. He writes that it is a

'false claim that the link with Britain was necessary to prevent economic depression through loss of markets, with resulting decline in traditional industries, rising unemployment and stagnation in agriculture.' (McLennan (1) p.5.)

By saying this, he gives the impression that the question of the British link is of no real concern to Protestant workers. By taking this step he makes it seem possible to fight for unity without raising the question of the British link. This rewriting of history by the Communist Party has gone so far that in their latest pamphlet the material basis for sectarianism is not even mentioned. (See Irene Brennan, *Northern Ireland—a programme for action*, pp6-8). The same approach shows itself elsewhere. To try and back up the CP call for a unity which ignores the British link, Chris Myant, assistant editor of the *Morning Star*, says:

'Not that the boot was always on the oppressors' foot. There was the magnificent united struggle by the workers of Belfast over unemployment relief work rates in October 1932.' (Comment 1 Nov 1975 p346.)

While this unity represented a tremendous step forward, it is the *only* significant example of unity of this kind that can be produced.

Throughout the Twenties and Thirties unemployment ran at far higher levels than that experienced in Britain. The typical response in this situation was for sectarianism to increase, because the struggle for jobs between Protestant and Catholic became fiercer. Only when unemployment reached quite exceptional levels did Protestant workers turn on their Unionist bosses. Employment in the shipbuilding industry had to fall by *more than 80 per cent* over a period of two years before this kind of elementary unity could occur. Both before and after the 1932 struggle there were vicious sectarian riots.

Unity cannot be achieved on economic issues alone, without consideration of either the different political roles of the Protestant and Catholic workers, or the

British link. The practical conclusion of Connolly's argument about the relation between Catholic and Protestant workers was that:

'Individuals out of other classes must and will help as individual Protestants have helped in the fight for Catholic emancipation in Ireland; but on the whole, the burden must rest upon the shoulders of the most subject class.' (Connolly p39.)

That is, upon the shoulders of the Catholic section of the working class.

Any attempt to solve the problem of unity amongst the Irish working class, North and South, Protestant and Catholic, which does not take account of the question of partition fairly and squarely ignores the central political problem in Ireland today.

The Protestant section of the working class, in adhering to loyalism, is supporting British imperialism. It is partition that has immeasurably deepened the divisions in the Irish working class movement and only the struggle to *reunite the country* can lay the basis for enabling the Irish labour movement to undertake a united struggle against capitalism. Until that unity of the nation is achieved the Irish labour movement will remain crippled in all important respects in its struggle with both foreign and native capital. The only unity which has any meaning in the present situation in Ireland is the unity against continued political domination by Britain. It sounds nice to talk about unity around demands for certain democratic reforms; but it does not get to grips with the reality of the situation existing in Ireland at the present time. The bitter sectarianism which exists, depends on the ability of the loyalist ruling class to dangle the carrot of continued privilege in front of the Protestant workers. This can only continue as long as the link with Britain is maintained. The gulf can not be bridged by goodwill alone. Sectarianism can be done away with only by removing its basis—the privileges real or promised which are entrenched by the British connection.

## UNITY, IMPERIALISM AND NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION

This bitter sectarianism and discrimination arose because the British ruling class needed an agent in Ireland to support its political domination of the whole island. This state of affairs has been continued and strengthened under partition. The divisions in the labour movement in Ireland, the problem of unity, the sectarianism and discrimination are a necessary result of the *national oppression* of the Irish by the British capitalist state. National oppression is the political domination of an economically backward nation by one that is more developed. From this recognition of the profound difference between oppressed and oppressor nations follows the need to recognise the right to self-determination. For the Communist Party, however, the national question as a question of the *political* dominance of one nation over another has vanished. In its place is erected the idea of a simple *economic* domination by the 'big monopolies' over small countries. The idea that the Irish suffer simply economic oppression at the hands of British imperialism is very clear from the following passage:

'Anything that weakens the big monopolies that exploit the people of Ireland would help the working class of Britain and its allies to challenge then defeat them . . .'  
(Brennan p22.)

Instead of recognising that Ireland is not only dominated by imperialism, but also, *politically* by the British state, the CP glosses over the national oppression suffered by Ireland and replaces it by a simple global domination by imperialism. This misses the central point. *All* countries are economically dominated by imperialism. What distinguishes Ireland is the fact of British *political oppression* of the nation.

Lenin vigorously challenged the commonly held conception that the only important question for socialists is 'economic domination'.

'Not only small estates, but even Russia for example, is entirely dependent, economically, on the power of the imperialist finance capital of the "rich" bourgeois countries . . . but that has nothing whatever to do with the question of national movements and the national state.

'For the question of the political self-determination of nations and their independence as states in bourgeois society, Rosa Luxemburg has substituted the question of their economic independence. This is just as intelligent as if someone, in discussing the programmatic demand for the supremacy of parliament, ie, the assembly of people's representatives, in a bourgeois state, were to expound the perfectly correct conviction that big capital dominates in a bourgeois country, whatever the regime in it.' (*Lenin* (1) p399.)

By supporting the idea that Ireland suffers only economic domination the CP have abandoned Lenin's distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations. Lenin wrote that 'the central point' of the Bolshevik programme

'must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the *essence* of imperialism, and is *deceitfully* evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of revolutionary struggle against imperialism.' (*Lenin* (2) p409.)

Recognising this distinction, Lenin asked :

'Is the *actual* condition of the workers in the oppressor and in the oppressed nations the same, from the standpoint of the national question?

'No it is not the same' (*Lenin* (3) p55).

Because of the differing conditions of the workers in the oppressed and oppressor nations, they had different tasks to perform in relation to the national question :

'what we demand, primarily, of the workers of the oppressed nations—this refers to the national question only—differs from what we demand of the workers of the oppressor nations.' (*Lenin* (3) p55.)

Instead of seeing the *different* tasks of the workers in the oppressed and the oppressor nations, the CP argues that workers in both countries face the same immediate problem, and must therefore carry out the *same* tasks :

'The struggle of the Irish working class and the British working class is a common struggle; there may be subjective differences in our relation to British imperialism in national, economic and cultural aspects, but the political objective of our struggle is one—the defeat once and for all of British Monopoly Capitalism and its replacement by Socialism in both our countries.' (*Marxism Today* Feb 1872 p42.)

The fact that one country has oppressed another for 800 years is hidden behind a cloud of 'subjective differences'. The result of this kind of analysis is to ignore

all the specific features of the Irish situation which prevent it from being a simple straightforward confrontation between labour and capital. Instead of trying to understand all the complexities of the Irish question, instead of facing up to the difficult problems presented by the Irish question, the CP simply puts its hands over its eyes and repeats over and over 'Workers of the world unite'. What a magnificent programme for social revolution!

Instead of facing the reality of the connection between sectarianism and the Union, the CP ignores it, and believes that working class unity can be built in Ireland without mentioning the question of partition:

'The way forward in Northern Ireland depends upon the building of unity between different sections of the working people and this can only be done when democratic reforms have made it possible for the movement to overcome sectarian divisions.' (*Brennan* pp12-13.)

For the CP, the acceptance of loyalist ideas by the working class is not to be attributed to objective reasons. We are told that the Cromwellian settlers:

'were dominated by loyalist ideas about the importance of the union with Britain . . . many of their descendants were still gripped by the same ideology and the accompanying religious bigotry. . . . the Protestant workers . . . have been befuddled by loyalist ideology.' (*Brennan* pp7-8.)

Why Protestant workers remain 'befuddled' by loyalist ideas up to the present day, the CP nowhere explains. Yet the answer to this question is the key to understanding the disunity and the sectarianism which besets the Irish labour movement. If we follow the CPs kind of non-explanation all we need to do is to 'befuddle' loyalist workers with talk of democracy! Unable to explain why loyalism has such a powerful grip on the Protestant section of the working class, the CP tries to treat Unionists as if they are conspiratorial demons, instead of flesh and blood reactionaries. The power of sectarianism, we are told, is the result of the 'reactionary manipulation' of the Unionist ruling class, and of the failure of British governments to fight this. Unionism has

'done all it can to weaken and divide the working class movement. Unfortunately it has had a large measure of success. Discrimination has been one of its most powerful weapons and it has been used skilfully to set Protestant and Catholic workers against one another.

. . . Discrimination has been easier to exercise because of the worsening economic situation . . . The policies of Unionism . . . have . . . been responsible for the decline in the Northern Ireland economy.' (*Brennan* pp7, 10.)

while

'The policies of the British government have cost the Irish dear . . . little is done to overcome the enormous economic and social problems caused by 50 years of hard-faced reactionary mismanagement of Northern Ireland's economy.' (*Brennan* p5.)

Instead of drawing out the connection between the privileges of Protestant workers guaranteed by the British link and the divisions within the working class, the CP prefers to talk of 'mismanagement' and 'befuddlement'.

We have to look back to the Irish labour movement's best traditions before we find a serious understanding of the problem. For Connolly, the divisions in the Irish labour movement were sustained and intensified by the partition of Ireland and the continued denial of self-determination to the Irish. Writing of the

proposed partition he argued :

'All hopes of uniting the workers, irrespective of religion or old political battle cries will be shattered, and through North and South the issues of Home Rule will be still used to cover the iniquities of the capitalist and landlord class.' (Connolly p60.)

For Connolly, partition would throw the Irish working class movement back, by deepening the divisions he was struggling to bridge :

'Such a scheme would destroy the Labour movement by disrupting it. It would perpetuate in a form aggravated in evil the discords now prevalent, and help the Home Rule and Orange capitalists and clerics to keep their rallying cries before the public as the political watchwords of the day. In short, it would make division more intense and confusion of ideas and parties more confounded.' (Connolly p53.)

To achieve unity within the labour movement, Home Rule—self-determination—was essential :

'But with the advent of Home Rule, nay even with the promise of Home Rule and the entrance of Ireland upon the normal level of civilised, self-governing nations, the old relation of Protestant and Catholic begins to melt and dissolve, and with their dissolution will come a new challenge in the relation of either faith to politics. The loss of its privileged position will mean for Protestantism the possibilities of an immense spiritual uplifting; and emergence into a knowledge of its kinship with its brothers and sisters of different creeds.' (Connolly p26.)

Connolly argued exhaustively that partition, the denial of self-determination, would reinforce bitter divisions in the Irish labour movement, and that division amongst the Irish working class could only be overcome if self-determination was achieved. The CP turns this on its head: It is the lack of unity and of democracy which is responsible for the failure of the Irish to achieve self-determination :

'real progress for Northern Ireland will lead towards the direction of full Irish self-determination. But that cannot be achieved without building unity between sections of people in the North and the South. An essential condition of this is the introduction of full democracy in the North.' (Brennan p6.)

Everything in this paragraph from the CP is turned upside down—for the CP, self-determination cannot be achieved, or even contemplated until unity has been attained. For Connolly, unity cannot be achieved without self-determination.

For the CP, this refusal to recognise that the continued national oppression of Ireland is the central aspect of the Irish question leads to a total inability to face up to the problem of partition, to understand the basis of disunity, or to grasp the contradictory position of Protestant workers. They throw everything that Marx, Lenin and Connolly said about the national question, and the question of 'Ulster' in particular, to the winds. The resulting political programme offers only a blind alley to the Irish workers. The Protestant section of the working class will not unite with Catholic workers, so long as the political domination of Britain sustains loyalism. Demands for equality in housing, jobs and local government are a threat to their privileges and will be seen as such by the loyalist workers. The demand for civil liberties will be interpreted as a demand for freedom for the advocates of Irish unification.

The question of partition cannot be dodged. Even if it is not raised by the CP, it arises in the minds of countless numbers of loyalist workers. The partition of Ireland has divided the labour movement not only in the North, but also in the

South. The early failure of the Irish labour movement to take the lead against British domination after the 1918 election all but destroyed its political influence. The Irish Labour Party has only managed to enter government by forming a coalition with the party of ranchers and big business, by passing ruthless repressive legislation and by helping to supervise one of the most severe attacks yet undertaken in Europe on the working class in the present crisis. Only if a socialist movement in the South of Ireland takes up the agitation for British withdrawal will the preconditions have been established for allaying the fears of loyalist workers, challenging the Unionist ruling class, and creating unity in order to struggle against imperialism.

The importance of the British working class lending support to the right of the Irish to self-determination—to full political independence—does not stop at helping the Irish labour movement. It is crucial for the British working class to support this demand in its own interests. Lenin and Marx argued that so long as the British workers allowed the British state to rule over Ireland,

'it (the working class) will have to join with them (the ruling class) in a common front against Ireland. Every one of its movements in England herself is crippled by the strife with the Irish, who form a very important section of the working class in England.' (*Marx and Engels* (1) p281.)

This danger of the ruling class being able to disarm a section of the working class, by playing on chauvinist prejudices has led to defeat after defeat of the international working class movement. The strength of South African capitalism has rested for decades on the support of a labour movement which called upon 'Workers of the world unite for a white South Africa'. Chauvinism is nothing but the same viewpoint applied to other nations. We continually run up against the backward argument that it is 'foreigners' who are responsible for problems which are actually caused by capitalism. If we are ever to see socialism, such dangerous and reactionary standpoints have to be fought against. Yet the CP bows before such prejudices and gives way in every important instance. In relation to the EEC John Gollan writes:

'Once in the Common Market the sovereignty of the British Parliament would be fatally undermined.' (*McLennan* (2) p19.)

Here the CP calls for self-determination for Britain, a rapacious imperialist power, while Ireland's claim to freedom, brutally denied for 800 years, is passed over in silence! Although the CP says that imperialism is responsible for the present situation in Ireland, it nowhere spells out precisely what it means by this. Instead of seeing that the decline of Unionist capital is a result of the fundamental tendencies of imperialism which can only be counteracted by a socialist revolution, it proposes utopian measures to change the 'policies' of imperialism.

What Lenin meant by 'Imperialism' was that capitalism had developed to such a point that it could no longer consistently develop the world economy. The major feature of this 'highest stage of capitalism' are the growth of enormous firms dependent on the banking and credit system, the export of capital in search of higher profits in place of the simple export of commodities, and intensifying competition between capitalist countries leading to world wars. All these changes in the capitalist system came about as the result of the

fundamental tendencies of capitalist development, and were not the result of simple changes in policy on the part of capitalists in the advanced countries. This point was an essential aspect of Lenin's analysis, and distinguished him from the reformist social-democrats, such as Kautsky. Kautsky had argued that imperialism was policy, and not the necessary result of the objective developments in capitalism.

'The essence of the matter is that Kautsky detaches the politics of imperialism from its economics, speaks of annexations as being a policy "preferred" by finance capital, and opposes to it another bourgeois policy which, he alleges, is possible on this very same basis of finance capital. . . . the result is bourgeois reformism instead of Marxism.' (*Lenin* (4) p270.)

Kautsky broke the link between the necessary consequences of imperialism—wars and annexations—and their material basis in capitalism. He could therefore separate the day to day political policy of imperialism from its basis in capitalism, and talk of merely altering the policies of imperialism in order to ameliorate the unpleasant effects of monopoly capitalism. For Lenin, on the other hand, the political policies of imperialism were the necessary political result of the economic needs of capitalism—the social and political results of imperialism cannot be finally done away with except by getting rid of their economic basis—imperialistic capitalism:

'a "fight" against the policy of the trusts and banks that does not affect the economic basis of the trusts and banks is mere bourgeois reformism and pacifism, the benevolent an innocent expression of pious wishes.' (*Lenin* (4) pp270-1.)

The political situation in the north of Ireland is not merely the result of 'wrong' policies on the part of the British government, but is the result of British imperialism itself. Ireland as a whole is an oppressed country. It has served as an agricultural colony of Britain for centuries. The major part of the industrial development which it has experienced has depended entirely upon capital exported from the advanced capitalist countries. The political and social crisis which exists in Ireland is the result of the development of capitalism, and not this or that 'policy'.

The situation which exists in the north of Ireland cannot be remedied or improved from the standpoint of the working class struggle simply by calling for the continuation of British imperialism's relation to Ireland, but with a different face. No change in the 'policy' applied by Britain in Ireland is sufficient. There has to be an ending of the British state's national oppression of Ireland, if a struggle is to be developed within Ireland against all other aspects of British imperialism.

Although it is impossible to do away with imperialism through a simple change in 'policy', this does not mean that we have to wait until after the socialist revolution before national oppression can or should be done away with. Far from it! *Unless* a serious struggle against national oppression is waged now, it will be impossible for a serious struggle against imperialism to develop in Britain or in Ireland. As Lenin put it

'The economic revolution will create the necessary prerequisites for eliminating *all* types of political oppression. Precisely for that reason it is illogical and incorrect to reduce everything to the economic revolution, for the question is: *how* to eliminate national oppression? It cannot be eliminated without an economic revolution. That

is incontestable. But to *limit* ourselves to this is to lapse into absurd and wretched imperialist economism.' (*Lenin* (3) p75.)

The reason? Without such a struggle, it will be impossible to show the working class that the real source of their problem is capitalism:

'Marxists know that democracy does *not* abolish class oppression. It only makes the class struggle more direct, wider, more open and pronounced, and that is what we need. . . . The fuller national equality (and it is *not* complete without freedom of secession), the clearer will the workers of the oppressed nations see that the cause of their oppression is capitalism, not lack of rights, etc.' (*Lenin* (3) p73.)

This idea lies behind Connolly's recognition that the immediate political target of the working class movement should be the achievement of Irish independence. Only with this barrier swept aside could a movement be developed to uproot imperialism and replace it with socialism.

'The development of democracy in Ireland has been smothered by the Union. Remove that barrier, throw the Irish people back upon their own resources, make them realise that the causes of poverty, of lack of progress, of arrested civic and national development, are then to be sought for within and not without, are in their power to remove or perpetuate . . .' (*Connolly* p20.)

The Marxist approach is very clear: end national oppression in order to set about ending imperialism. Yet the very clear distinction between the ending of political domination and the ending of economic domination is blurred by the CP. In its call for a change in policy it ends up attacking neither economic imperialism nor Britain's continued political domination of Ireland. Instead, it relies upon Britain's continued *political domination* in order to be able to get rid of the results of *economic imperialism* through a change in the policy implemented by the British state in Ireland:

'During the last five years, both Labour and Tory governments have been pursuing repressive, reactionary . . . policies in Northern Ireland.

What is needed is a completely new policy: the present evils in Northern Ireland arise from a situation where sectarianism and discrimination have been supported by repression and the ideology of Unionism and the Protestant ascendancy. That situation can and must be changed by the introduction and implementation of democratic reforms embodied in a Bill of Rights, and by social and economic changes that will provide the basis for peace and progress in Northern Ireland.' (*Brennan* pp4-6.)

This is precisely the 'benevolent and innocent expression of pious wishes' which Lenin attacked so savagely. Because the CP has abandoned its original Marxist analysis of partition, it does not understand the inseparable link between the Union and the divisions in the Irish labour movement. Because the CP does not see the root of the problem in the application of a *British* policy to Ireland, it is reduced to merely trying to moderate national oppression instead of abolishing it. It therefore wants to have the British government apply progressive policies in Ireland.

But this approach will bring the opposite of the desired effect. Because the CP makes no practical proposals for ending of the Union, it is incapable of surmounting sectarianism, deepening it rather than removing it. Its call for unity thus becomes absolutely utopian, disarming the working class instead of pointing a clear way forward.

Just as utopian are its proposals to reform the effects of British imperialism in Ireland.

### How the CP 'fights' British imperialism

When we examine what the CP means by 'social and economic changes that will provide the basis for peace and progress in Northern Ireland', we see that these far from 'affect the economic basis of the trusts and the banks'. On the contrary, they are an attempt to strengthen, rather than weaken the hold of British economic, political and military imperialism in Ireland, without making any concession to the right of the Irish to self-determination, except in words.

What are Brennan's proposals for social and economic changes?

'It is imperative that there should be massive state investment in Northern Ireland industry; equality of work opportunity is extremely difficult to fight for in a situation of grave and continuous unemployment.' (Brennan p25.)

The Communist Party concurred at its recent congress, by demanding that the British government

'Introduce an economic development programme designed to eliminate unemployment and the housing shortage and to meet urgent social needs.' (Comment 29 November 1975 p407.)

Does this mean that the British capitalist firms are to find their interests undermined? Not at all. In fact they are to be propped up by the British capitalist state. And this is exactly the same as the policy proposed by the Labour government. Listen to Stan Orme, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office:

'I get severely criticised by Members for Tyneside, Merseyside and Clydebanks, about the amount of Government support for Northern Ireland. I make no apology for this support; in my opinion it is crucial because it is essential to get a stable economy which can be an important factor in getting political stability as well.' (Tribune 7 November 1975.)

Brennan says she and her organisation are opposed to the present 'bi-partisan' policy on Northern Ireland. What does she replace it with? A 'Tri-partisan' policy—the CP, the Labour Party, and the Tory Party—all agree on maintaining the British presence in the north but disagree with one another about the policies which the government should pursue there.

Brennan's argument for increased British state involvement flies in the face of reality. Lenin argued long ago that capitalism had entered a stage of its development in which it was generally unable to develop the backward countries. This theoretical conclusion has been supported by the progress, or rather lack of progress, experienced by these countries since then. Brennan turns all this on its head. History has shown us that the lack of democracy that exists in the North is due to the inability of capitalism to develop Ireland. Brennan says that the North must be developed with the aid of British capital's state in order to furnish the basis of democracy. She is trying to will Capital to do something that it cannot do and is therefore sowing illusions about what can and must be done by the British working class. The Irish question has been a consistent thorn in the side of the British ruling class for centuries. If British capital was so profitable that state expenditure could have been increased sufficiently to introduce

democracy and destroy the bastions of Unionism this would have been done long ago.

As we have spelt out above, the lack of rights experienced in the North of Ireland originated in the backwardness of local capitalist industry. It could only keep its profits up and hope to compete with rival capitalists if it could keep the working class divided and repressed. By doing so it was able to turn their actions away from political activity which would challenge capitalism as such. The period of growth experienced in the North in the late sixties which originated in the influx of foreign investment attracted by the subsidies offered by the British state seemed to have made the need for this continued repression and lack of democracy irrelevant. Thus the Wilson government thought that it would be possible to reform the northern state into accord with the needs of the more highly productive foreign capital, whose profits depend less on the level of wages paid than on the level of productivity generated by its modern machinery. There is no doubt that *if* it was possible to develop the economy of the North of Ireland in this fashion, then the original basis of discrimination would be crushed, jobs would be furnished for all, and outworn sectarian beliefs could be jettisoned to make way for a more advanced consciousness and struggle based upon the direct confrontation of labour with capital.

When Brennan argues the case for increased state investment, she accepts that such a strategy is possible. It is not possible. What does the call for more British investment in the North of Ireland mean? The huge influx of foreign capital during the sixties brought about a massive *fall* in employment in manufacturing industry as men were replaced by machinery, allowing for higher productivity and competitive prices. Employment in manufacturing industry fell from 201,000 in 1950 to 166,000 in 1973 while productivity rose at twice the British rate during the late sixties.

Clearly this productivity increase and associated unemployment was and is necessary for capital to be attracted to Northern Ireland. The only alternative is for wages to be driven down to even lower levels. Such is the logic of capital. Any call for further investment in Ireland must reckon with this logic unless it is simply an appeal for charity. But British capital cannot provide this kind of industrial expansion and Brennan is merely creating illusions about what can and should be done in relation to the attempt to overcome sectarianism in the north.

When we look around us we see a Labour government carrying through a whole programme of cuts in state expenditure. Why is this? Is it simply because of right wing labour leaders? Or is it that continued state expenditure on the scale to which the working class has been accustomed in the post-war period cannot be afforded by a system based on the capitalist mode of production? If the former is the case, then the struggle is one simply to loosen the grip on the state purse strings; if the latter, then no British state corporation can provide long term job security in the North of Ireland.

The expansion of the economic role of the state was possible in the early post-war years because the worldwide defeats suffered by the working class movement through fascism and war had allowed capital to rationalise itself and therefore to make itself profitable once again. However the fundamental tenden-

cies of capital are once again reasserting themselves. In Britain the rate of profit on capital has been declining since the mid-fifties. The Tories and the present Labour government have adopted policies designed to prop up capital. They are therefore committed to cutting state expenditure. To expect such a government to make an exception on the question of the North of Ireland springs either from naivety or from cynicism. No British capitalist state can provide sufficient funds to create full employment in the six counties for an indefinite period. It follows that the British presence in Ireland, far from promoting democracy, will necessitate a further intensification of repression to maintain its imperialist interests. The struggle to remove the British troops is therefore a struggle against imperialism and socialists cannot, without ceasing to be socialists, equivocate on this issue.

## IRELAND AND THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT

The question of Ireland has long been ignored by the British labour movement. On few questions has such complete agreement been shown between the Labour and Tory parties. Through each successive escalation of the repression, slaughter and bloodshed, hardly a voice has been raised to question 'bipartisan' politics, let alone challenge the imperialist domination of the north. This is only possible because the working class in Britain has no *independent* voice in Ireland.

### Why our struggle?

Why should British workers make the struggle for national liberation of the Irish people **their** struggle? The Irish question is a *class* question which cannot be separated from the general struggle to defend the interests of workers which all militants recognise in their workplaces. The capitalist idea that there is a 'national British interest' which stands above class interest is central to the attacks being carried out on the British working class in the present crisis. 'Whenever the working class accepts this idea of a national interest it ends up cutting its own throat. The £6 pay limit, the cuts in social expenditure, rising unemployment—all have been declared to be in the national interest. In just the same way the British government seeks to draw British workers behind it in its attacks on the Irish people. It seems we all have a 'duty' to 'restore peace' to the 'troubled' people of Northern Ireland. So far the ruling class has proved successful in drawing the working class into a political alliance on the question of Ireland. As long as workers accept the so-called right of Britain to interfere in the affairs of the Irish, it accepts a common interest as 'British People' *against* the Irish. Consequently, it supports the idea of a national interest which is nothing other than the interests of the ruling class to which workers in Britain must sacrifice their own interests. This is what Marx meant when he wrote in 1869:

'quite apart from all phrases about "international" and "humane" justice for Ireland . . . it is in the direct and absolute interests of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland.' (Marx and Engels p284, emphasis in original.)

## Bill of Rights

It is not only the present Labour government and Tory opposition who argue that the British working class should support the 'right' of the British government to interfere in the affairs of the Irish—the Communist Party, the left of the Labour Party and the TUC all argue the same position. For the chauvinist concept of the national interest has a left as well as a right face. It is easy to see that the present policies of the Labour Government and Tory Party offer no way forward for Irish or British workers—and are not intended to. But the arguments of the CP/Labour Party/TUC are more pernicious because they present themselves as socialist solutions to the Northern Ireland crisis. For this reason we will deal with the arguments in some detail. The call for a Bill of Rights was first put forward by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), and the CP. The most up to date statement of it and the arguments behind it is contained in the pamphlet *Northern Ireland: a programme for action* by Irene Brennan. It is this that we shall concentrate on here.

Brennan argues that,

'The way forward in Northern Ireland depends upon the Building of unity between different sections of the working people and this can only be done when democratic reforms have made it possible for the movement to overcome sectarian divisions.' (Brennan pp12-13.)

It is quite true that lack of democracy completely split the working class in the North. To fight for democracy is part and parcel of the fight for socialism. But exactly what kind of democracy does Brennan advocate? Does she argue for the fundamental democratic reform which would make the re-uniting of the working class a real possibility? She calls for a 'new policy' on the part of Britain (in conjunction with the Irish, naturally!) with three major features:

1. An end to repression.
2. The introduction and implementation of democratic rights and social and economic reforms.
3. The withdrawal of the British armed forces.

(Brennan p22.)

Let's examine this 'programme' for democracy. Of course, at such a level of generality all democrats would support an end to the vicious repression existing in the north, the smashing of discrimination there, and the withdrawal of British troops who are used to uphold the interests of British imperialism. But a programme cannot remain at the level of pious generalities. When it comes to details, things begin to look different, and our democrat is not, after all, so very democratic—she ignores the central democratic question of the right of the Irish people to self-determination. For socialists the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination is a central guiding principle, as Lenin argued 60 years ago:

'the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the *essence* of imperialism, and is *deceitfully* evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky . . . It is from this division that *our* definition of the "right of nations to self-determination" must follow, a definition that is consistently democratic, revolutionary, and *in accord* with the general task of the immediate struggle for socialism. . . . Social-Democrats of the

oppressor nations must demand that the oppressed nations should have the right of secession . . .' (*Lenin* (2) p409.)

What does our democratic friend have to say about this? Trying to grasp what Brennan is saying is like trying to find a bar of soap in the bath: every time you think you've got hold of it, it slips out of your hands. The pamphlet begins with a **bold declaration**:

'The time is long since past to end, once and for all, British imperialism in Ireland. For centuries the Irish people have been struggling for their freedom. Fifty years ago they did achieve political independence—but only for 26 out of the 32 counties of Ireland.'

For a moment one might think that Brennan supports self-determination after all. The logic of this 'bold declaration' is clearly that political independence should be granted to the whole of Ireland. But we soon see that these are merely fine words that disguise quite different politics. In the pamphlet Brennan argues that the answer to oppression and the denial of civil and democratic rights is for the British government to introduce a Bill of Rights:

'The British Government must be forced by the British labour movement to implement the (demands for a Bill of Rights).' (*Brennan* p24.)

So, first our democrat 'boldly declares' that the time is long past to end British rule and second she declares that the time has come to force the British government to *continue* its rule—but with a different policy. This contradiction is repeated with regard to the question of *enforcement* of a Bill of Rights—a question that our democrats find embarrassing.

Brennan has this to say:

'if the troops are taken off the streets and withdrawn to barracks, pending their ultimate withdrawal, there will need to be a radical restructuring of the local forces. Both NICRA and Official Sinn Fein have made proposals for a non-sectarian police force. Such a force would need to operate according to the provisions of the Bill of Rights and be under an independent and democratically controlled police authority.' (*Brennan* p27.)

An independent police authority—but independent of what? Of the British state? Ireland may be a unique situation but the CP will search in vain to find a case where the capitalist state has allowed police functions to be placed in the hands of the working class. But of course, the CP is not talking about independence from the bourgeois state. Even the *Morning Star* found itself forced to recognise the idealism of such calls:

'And when the violence does come, the British labour movement must be prepared to use every ounce of its strength to force the army command to use its military power in defence of democracy.' (*Morning Star* 24 October 1974.)

Clearly, all the talk of 'independent' police forces and troop withdrawals is for the consumption of the more gullible CP members. The real content of the Bill of Rights proposal turns out to be a demand for bourgeois political 'normality' guaranteed by law and backed up by the army and repressive apparatus of the state.

But to return to the question of democracy. Brennan poses as the hard-headed democrat in opposition to the starry-eyed and dangerous ultra-lefts who want socialism straight away. We asked earlier what kind of democracy does Brennan

advocate? And we pointed out that the demand for self-determination was central to the struggle for democracy in Northern Ireland. Cde Brennan is correct to take issue with those who really don't recognise the importance of democratic demands and the struggle to achieve them. But the basic democratic demand for Ireland is the right of self-determination. Brennan, however, forgetting her bold declaration, treats the right to self-determination as something separate from democratic rights. She writes:

'the struggle for democratic rights is an essential part of the progress of the Irish people towards self-determination. . . . the struggle for national self-determination is closely and inseparably linked with the fight for democracy.' (Brennan p23.)

Unfortunately for our democrat, the struggle for self-determination is not merely 'closely' and 'inseparably' linked with the struggle for democracy. The struggle for self-determination is a struggle for democracy. To put the matter in the way Brennan does, is to support only *some* democracy, but not *all* democracy. Socialists however do not fight for this or that democratic right—they fight to defend and extend *all* democratic rights without exception. And any reform of Northern Ireland which did not include the right of the Irish people as a whole to self-determination would make a fiction of democracy. Again Lenin recognised the importance of the struggle for all democratic rights:

'The proletariat cannot be victorious except through democracy, ie. by giving full effect to democracy and by linking with each step of its struggle democratic demands formulated in the most resolute terms. . . . We must *combine* the revolutionary struggle against capitalism with a revolutionary programme and tactics on *all* democratic demands: a republic, a militia, popular election of officials, equal rights for women, self-determination of nations etc.' (Lenin (2) p408.)

Everywhere Brennan puts herself forward as a democrat, but whenever it comes to practical formulations of her programme she *refuses* to support the democratic right of the Irish to self-determination.

Instead the capitalist state will be won round to defending the interests of the working class, and the British army will meekly tag along behind:

'The use and behaviour of the British troops is determined by the policies they are directed to pursue by the British government. That is why the question of their behaviour and withdrawal must be linked to the fight to change government policy.' (Gordon McLennan (1) pp13-14.)

We have heard this kind of argument before—in Chile. There it was argued that a bourgeois army could defend the interests of the working class by defending democracy and the constitution. A matter of days before the barbaric coup of September 1973, Luis Corvalan (General Secretary of the Chilean CP) had this to say:

'We continue to support the absolutely professional character of the armed institutions. Their enemies are not amongst the ranks of the people but in the reactionary camp.' (Marxism Today September 1973.)

Is the present Chilean regime an example of the kind of 'democracy' the CP wants the British army to enforce in Ireland? The CP's opportunist ideas about democracy and the British army will only lead to the intensification of repression in the North of Ireland, and not to its abolition.

A second main theme of the CP argument is that winning these limited demo-

cratic reforms is the only basis for the national struggle, as these reforms would undermine sectarianism and lay the basis for the re-uniting of Protestant and Catholic workers. The Bill of Rights, then, is seen as a first step towards a united socialist Republic. Unfortunately this grand design overlooks the reality of the situation. Northern Ireland was originally established in response to the demands of the Unionist bourgeoisie of the North with the support of the Loyalists of the Northern working class. It was founded on material interests; and although the nature of these interests has changed since 1922, the Protestant workers of the North still enjoy real privileges over their Catholic counterparts. This is the basis of their support for the Northern Ireland state, and of their sectarianism. The existence of the Northern Ireland statelet itself is the clearest expression of their material interests. *These divisions cannot be legislated away within the context of that statelet.* However, our 'democratic realist' likes to refer to this as 'a defeatist attitude towards the building of unity between Protestant and Catholic workers'. Attitudes, it seems, are more important than analysis in today's CP!

The third theme of the CP argument is that of the possibility of civil war—the so-called 'bloodbath theory'. This theory is as follows: British troops have no right to be in Ireland *but* if they were withdrawn 'prematurely' there would be a Loyalist pogrom on an unprecedented scale; therefore they must stay in, be forced to change their role, 'hold the ring' while civil rights are established and sectarianism is overcome. So runs the argument. The logic behind it is rarely brought out into the open—indeed, it is denied. This logic is one which presupposes a neutral state. That is, it is based on the idea that the policies and actions of the state do not spring from its nature as a *class* state but rather depend on the amount of pressure applied by contending classes—bourgeoisie and working class. This logic is carefully concealed because our democrats wish to be regarded as Marxists. Dim memories of Marx's and Lenin's writings on the state still haunt them.

For Lenin the nature of the state—any state—was quite clear:

'The state, even in a democratic republic, is nothing but a machine for the suppression of one class by another.' (*Lenin* (5) p322.)

and on bourgeois parliaments, the kind of parliament that the CP is going to force to defend the interests of Irish workers in the North.

'the bourgeois parliaments are . . . instruments for the oppression of the workers by the bourgeoisie, institutions of a hostile class, of the exploiting minority.' (*Lenin* (5) p247, emphasis in the original.)

This is the starting point for Marxists, for those who wish to defend the interests of the working class. We ask comrades of the CPGB: whose interests are defended by the idea that the state is neutral or can be simply 'taken over' by the working class? Whose interests are defended by the slightest obscuring of the class nature of the state or of the necessity for the destruction of its apparatus?

'The class interests of the bourgeoisie, in whose wake these petty-bourgeois traitors to Marxism [ie Kautsky, Vandervelde et al in Lenin's day] are floundering, demand that this question be evaded, that it be hushed up . . .' (*Lenin* (5) p325, emphasis in the original.)

The supposed neutrality of the state is the soothing lullaby that rocks every

bourgeois commentator and Fleet Street scribbler to sleep. It is the starting-point of every attack that the working class faces in today's crisis. Parliament, the courts, the police, the Government—all are said to be above class interests, arbiters of the 'national' interest, the 'public good', etc. Any position, any policy that obscures the question of the class nature of the state, or the question of state power, leads the working class straight into the welcoming arms of the bourgeoisie.

If pressed, CPGB theoreticians would probably agree that the state is not neutral—that it is, indeed, a bourgeois state. They proudly point to the *British Road to Socialism* to prove this. Yet they continue to argue that parliamentary change can bring about socialism, that parliament—given a 'left' majority—can democratise Northern Ireland. In other words their first line of retreat is the idea although the state as such is a bourgeois state, its apparatus and institutions can be transformed into socialist institutions. Again, Marx and Lenin saw things differently. Marx and Engels in 1872 proposed the following addition to the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848:

'One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes".' (*Marx and Engels* (2) 1872 Introduction.)

And as Lenin said of Kautsky who also believed that the working class could simply take over the institutions of bourgeois democracy:

'Kautsky has in a most unparalleled manner distorted the concept dictatorship of the proletariat and has turned Marx into a common liberal, that is, he himself has sunk to the level of a liberal who utters banal phrases about "pure democracy" [today this goes under the title of "advanced democracy" or "anti-monopoly democratic alliance"] embellishing and glossing over the class content of bourgeois democracy and shrinking, above all, from the use of *revolutionary violence* by the oppressed class.' (*Lenin* (5) p241.)

Thus, for Lenin the Kautskyite notion of abstract democracy (ie, democracy separated from the question of class content) was a 'most unparalleled' distortion of Marxism. The CPGB simply repeats this distortion.

The response of certain 'theoreticians' at this point is usually to rush to the shelf marked 'Handy arguments against "Trotskyism"', pull out their dog-eared copies of Lenin's pamphlet 'Left-wing communism, an infantile disorder' and give a garbled lecture on the need to utilise the institutions of the bourgeois state. Unfortunately for them, we've already been there. How does Lenin pose the question of revolutionary utilisation of bourgeois parliaments?

'It is because, in Western Europe, the backward masses of the workers and—to an even greater degree—of the small peasants are much more imbued with *bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices* than they were in Russia; because of that, it is only from within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that Communists can (and must) wage a long and persistent struggle, undaunted by any difficulties, to *expose, dispel and overcome* these prejudices.' (*Lenin* (6) p65. Emphasis added.)

Have our democrats discovered something new in bourgeois democracy since Lenin wrote? If they have it is their duty to inform us. The interests of the working class are served by theoretical and political clarity, not sleight-of-hand that turns an ordinary liberal prejudice into a 'revolutionary' policy.

The British state is a bourgeois state, not a neutral one. The problem of the North, then, is not a question of which particular policy is being applied. The problem is rooted in the political annexation of the 6 counties by the British state—and the 'problem' will exist as long as this annexation continues. What is true of the state is also true of the army. The army of the British state cannot be made to act in the interests of the working class—Irish or British. Consequently, if the conditions for a *real* peace are to be developed then the first priority is the immediate withdrawal of British troops. The army is not and cannot be a peace-keeping force—it can only act in the interests of the ruling class. The necessity of an independent position for the working class becomes apparent here. Only such a position—independent of the British state—can guarantee that British workers will not be drawn into a bloody and destructive conflict with the Irish. This is the real bloodbath that *must* be avoided, and *can only* be avoided on the basis of the right of the Irish to self-determination and the immediate withdrawal of British troops.

### **What position should the British workers adopt on the Irish question?**

As socialists and workers, we must see the Irish question as a question that directly involves our own class interests and recognise that we have the same interests as Irish workers in ending the annexation of the North. This means turning against the chauvinist ideas that have been bred in the working class and to which the CP is adapting in its proposals for Ireland. The chauvinist idea that British workers have more in common with the British ruling class than with workers in other countries is deeply rooted in this country. For example in 1974, striking Scottish drivers blacked the transport of all goods with two exceptions—essential supplies to hospitals and . . . supplies to the army of occupation in the six counties of Ireland. Yet few saw and pointed out the contradictory position in which the lorry drivers found themselves. Following the Birmingham bombings last November, thousands of workers took to the streets against Irish republican forces and many marched behind the National Front banners. The ease with which the National Front were able to exploit the bombings shows the dangers ahead for us on the Irish question.

The domination of the world economy by British capital in its imperial heyday gave certain sections of the working class a marginally privileged position and tied it ideologically to ruling class interests. Thus was born the idea of a national interest and of the British state's civilising mission (otherwise known as imperialist expansion) in the world—a special role which stood above sordid class questions. It is this kind of thinking that pervades the Brennan pamphlet and the other documents on the Bill of Rights position. In case it may be thought that Brennan is simply an eccentric whom the CP humours for some unaccountable reason, the following statement was made by R. Palme Dutt in *Labour Monthly* in July 1974.

'In this complex situation there is (danger) that some sections of popular opinion in Britain, . . . should fall into the trap of advocating as an alternative programme that the menace of the crisis and offensive of reaction in N Ireland, created by British imperialist policy, should be left for the Irish people to settle [heaven forbid!], in place of recognising the joint responsibility of the British and Irish working people to work together for a solution in the interests of both peoples.' (Quoted in *Marxism Today* Aug 1975 p244.)

The colonial paternalism of the thinking behind this statement is evident. The only responsibility that the British working class has towards Ireland is that of guaranteeing that the British capitalist state will cease to interfere in the affairs of the Irish. That is, its responsibility is to struggle for *immediate political withdrawal* from N Ireland. A struggle which Dutt later refers to as 'spurious non-intervention'!

The chauvinist conception of 'responsibility' towards the Irish which Dutt repeats, has been greatly strengthened by the 54 years of existence of 'Northern Ireland' as part of the Westminster state. Thus it becomes particularly difficult to recognise the real tasks of the British working class with regard to Ireland.

The progress of the Irish people towards socialism is inseparable from their progress towards national independence. The progress of the British working class towards socialism is impossible so long as they remain, in the words of Marx,

'tied to the leading-strings of the ruling classes, because *it* (the working class) will have to join with them (the ruling class) in a common front against Ireland. Every one of its movements in England herself is crippled by the strife with the Irish, who form a very important section of the working class in England.' (*Marx & Engels* (1) p281.)

Internationalism consists precisely in the recognition that the workers of one country share the same interests as workers of other countries and have diametrically opposed interests to those of their own ruling class. This political understanding is a direct practical necessity in response to capitalism on a world scale. To argue that British workers should back their own ruling class against the Irish is to draw workers along the path of the bourgeoisie and its interests and consequently abandon their own. And the very same people who argue that British workers should support the right of the British state to legislate on behalf of the Irish (who presumably are not capable of legislating for themselves) also argue for national solutions to the present economic crisis with their demands for import controls, regeneration of 'our' industry and so on. So that textile workers are called on to ally themselves with textile capitalists in this country against the textile workers of the rest of the world. When workers adopt the standpoint of the ruling class it always acts against them, turning them against their Irish brothers and sisters in the one case and against themselves when the trade war resulting from import controls leads to further loss of trade and so more unemployment throughout the world—including Britain. The only position on Ireland which expresses an independent working class standpoint is that which rejects absolutely the right of the British state to interfere in the affairs of the Irish people. We have seen throughout this pamphlet that the demand for self-determination is central to the revolutionary position on Ireland.

The demand for *immediate* withdrawal of British troops is not a matter of timing or simply a more radical version of the left reformist call for a phased withdrawal—it is the only demand which can express the independence of working class interests from those of the ruling class and which calls for an end to British political dominance of any part of Ireland. The two demands: *Troops Out Now!* and *Self-determination for the Irish People as a Whole* form a clear political programme for the British working class on the question of Ireland.

It is the only programme which points to a real way forward for the British working class by posing a break with the ruling class. This programme alone lays the real basis for unity of the working class in Ireland. It is both utopian and reactionary to believe that working class unity can be achieved within the stagnant economy of the Northern Ireland statelet. Only by posing the necessity of socialism, only by demanding a common front against British political domination can Protestant and Catholic workers be united on a working class basis. It is the only programme which demonstrates that the interests of the British working class lie in the genuine equality of nations—the only real basis for internationalism—and not in sustaining the oppression of nations by imperialist powers like Britain.

One argument that is often raised at this point is that the Irish themselves are not calling for immediate withdrawal, that the Irish themselves are calling for a Bill of Rights in the North. Surely we should support their demands and not seek to impose our own on the Irish? This argument confuses two *separate* issues: (1) the tasks of the working class in the oppressed nation (Ireland) and (2) the tasks of the working class in the oppressor nation (Britain). This distinction—which Lenin called ‘the essence of imperialism’—finds no place in the policy advocated by the CP, TUC and Left Labour MPs. As revolutionaries, we approach the Irish question from the point of view of the interests of the working class. This approach is two-fold: giving concrete solidarity to the national struggle of the Irish people and advancing the revolutionary independence of the British working class. The idea that the tasks of the British working class are different from and not determined by the tasks of the Irish working class conflicts with this ‘common-sense’ notion of ‘aiding the Irish’ put forward by the CP among others. Yet what did Lenin have to say on the subject?

‘the action is twofold . . . (a) first, it is the “action” of the nationally oppressed proletariat and peasantry *jointly* with the nationally oppressed bourgeoisie against the oppressor nation; (b) second, it is the “action” of the proletariat, or of its class conscious section in the oppressor nation *against* the bourgeoisie of that nation and all elements that follow it.’ (*Lenin* (3) p62, emphasis in the original.)

For the British working class the primary task is to break its tacit alliance with its own bourgeoisie by demanding an immediate end to British interference in the affairs of the Irish people. Such a policy, at one and the same time, gives concrete aid to the struggle of the Irish and advances the political independence of the British working class. But quite apart from the separate approach of the working class in the two countries (Ireland and Britain) towards the same goal, socialism, the call for phased withdrawal and a Bill of Rights which *is* supported by the ITUC and majority sections of the Republican Movement offers no way forward whatever for the Irish. It is nothing other than the adoption of a reformist attitude to the national question and therefore is no solution at all. Further, phased withdrawal, ie the declaration of an intent to withdraw after a set period, would unleash the very bloodbath it claims to prevent.

To call on the British state to announce an intention to withdraw without *actually* withdrawing, whilst introducing legislation that will be violently opposed by loyalists, is to lay the basis for a bloodbath, for a pogrom by the loyalists to force the British state to rescind its decision.

From the moment that the British state declared a future withdrawal date the

forces of loyalist reaction would mobilise to force the reversing of such a decision. Only an immediate withdrawal, backed by a mass anti-imperialist movement in this country, could demonstrate to the loyalists that they can no longer call on the army of the British state to prop up and defend their ascendancy.

Thus, to call on the British working class to campaign for phased withdrawal, coupled with the introduction of more British legislation (the Bill of Rights) is to call for a mass working class movement to *support* British political annexation of the six counties, to *support* the denial of the right of the Irish to determine their own future.

As we said before, 'The progress of the Irish people towards socialism is inseparable from their progress towards national independence'. The interests of the Irish can only be defended by calling for *immediate* withdrawal and immediate recognition of their right to self-determination. The responsibility and the direct interest of the British working class are contained in the struggle for those two demands—a struggle which is, at the same time, a struggle to free itself from the domination of its own bourgeoisie.

The completion of the national revolution in Ireland in the interests of the Irish working class would, of itself, mark a new stage for the British working class in its own struggle for socialism. The two struggles can never be divorced, one from the other. There is *no* way forward for the British working class unless the demands for immediate withdrawal and recognition of the right of the Irish to self-determination are fought for by the mass of the working class in a clear anti-imperialist movement.

### **Terrorism, violence, and the Irish question**

The whole political orientation exemplified in the CP approach to the question of Ireland leads to a slavish submission to the ruling class. This becomes very clear when it encounters the problem of violence. The day following the killings of 10 Protestant workers in Armagh, the *Morning Star* carried this report:

'Official Sinn Fein in a statement said that the people of the North continue to bear the brunt of sectarian killing and violence because the British government are not prepared to tackle sectarianism in that area.

'Loyalist and Provisional violence has fed like a vulture on British policies which have been a godsend to every sectarian bigot in Northern Ireland. . . .

'The deaths also brought a demand from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association that the government takes serious action at last against the killer bands.' (*Morning Star* 6 Jan 1976.)

The whole logic of these demands—from organisations which support the CP programme—is for the British state to intensify repression, to direct it *not only* against Catholics, *but also* against Protestants. This is the only kind of 'unity' and 'equality' that the CP proposals can bring about—the submission of the entire Northern Irish working class to the jackboot of British imperialism.

By supporting the British link, the CP refuses to take any steps in the direction that would undermine sectarianism. When sectarian violence actually breaks out therefore, the CP can only respond by calling upon the British state to 'tackle' the problem—an appeal which can only mean greater repression.

The same kind of logic is applied by the CP to violence which occurs in Britain. Recently, the CP General Secretary took the position that the present level of repression against the Irish in Britain is satisfactory, and that it would be merely a little excessive to continue to employ the Prevention of Terrorism Act:

'Without the Act the police already possess adequate and very substantial powers to deal with bombings and other such acts of violence.' (*Morning Star* 4 Nov 1975.)

This must be a very comforting thought for those who oppose the right of the Irish to struggle for self-determination!

The violence which occurs, both in Britain and Ireland, is a result of the continued national oppression of the Irish. Instead of saying so, and instead of making clear that the only way to avoid violence is to consistently struggle against national oppression, the CP engages in haggling over just how much repression is needed from the British state in Britain and Ireland. The most vocal sections of the labour movement in Britain presently side with the ruling class in opposing the right of the Irish to self-determination. Is it therefore any wonder that the Republican movement responds with desperate and pessimistic measures?

The violence of the oppressed and the oppressor cannot be equated. The utter indifference of the British working class movement to the oppression by the British state of the Irish has given rise to despair throughout the ranks of the Republican Movement and has helped to undermine the socialist movement in Ireland. The consequences of such despair are evident in the form in which Republican violence manifests itself on both sides of the Irish Sea. But those in the oppressor country who make the criticism of the Republicans their prime concern are in effect withholding support from the struggle of the Irish people. It is little surprise that those organisations such as the CPGB, WRP, Militant etc, who share a common misunderstanding of the national question, reject any participation in the practical tasks of building an anti-imperialist movement based on an independent working class perspective.

For all its verbal protestations to the contrary, the CP is in the forefront of those scabbing on the Irish people.

CP policy on Ireland differs only in details from that of the Labour and Tory governments. On all the essential aspects of the Irish question it stands proudly alongside the present bipartisan policy. Should 'Northern Ireland' remain part of the 'United Kingdom'?—Yes! Can a British capitalist state democratise the North?—Yes! Should the British army remain to 'keep the peace'?—Yes! This spineless chorus is chanted in every statement and resolution from the CPGB on Ireland. The attacks on sections of the Republican Movement in the *Morning Star* are as hysterical as those of the *Daily Telegraph*. An organisation so obsessed in its rhetoric with defending democracy that it ignores the struggle for socialism cannot even bring itself to defend the right of the Irish people to self-determination. And these are dubbed 'progressive' policies! Progress to where? The only progress such policies can bring is progress to disaster.

It was not always so. In a CPGB pamphlet of 1921, William Paul wrote:

'We, the Communists of the British Party, have a sacred duty to perform in connection with the Irish question. We must help Ireland in her struggle against Britain.' (Paul p13.)

Then the CPGB recognised that the central question was one of the freedom of the Irish to determine their own future. Then they were prepared to defend this central democratic right to argue the necessity of breaking the link with Britain. Then the CPGB opposed the partition of Ireland and denounced the subsequent settlement. But today this fundamental opposition to partition and support for Irish national unity and independence has disappeared. In the latest and most disgusting offering of the CPGB, *Northern Ireland—a programme for action*, Irene Brennan quotes the passage from Paul . . . but omits the essential sentence: 'We must help Ireland in her struggle against Britain'. In the pursuit of 'progressive' policies the CPGB is not above 'selective' quotation from its own documents. Helping the Irish in their struggle against Britain is the one thing that the CP now refuses to do—given their conception of socialism, this is hardly surprising. They are quite incapable of helping the Irish. Grandiose plans are drawn up to democratise the North, to 'force' the police to act 'fairly' (!) and to create jobs—all quite utopian and useless. The simple, basic, elementary democratic right of self-determination is at best given a purely formal support and at worst openly sneered at. The actual struggle for self-determination being waged by the Republican forces is nothing more than an embarrassment to our 'progressives'. Lenin was never embarrassed about such struggles:

'National self-determination is the same as the struggle for complete national liberation, for complete independence, against annexation, and socialists cannot—without ceasing to be socialists—reject such a struggle in whatever form, right down to an uprising or war.' (*Lenin* (3) p34.)

What has changed in the 50 years since partition? Ireland or the CP? Sectarianism, of which partition is the embodiment, is still as powerful as ever. But CP policy has changed from courageous support for the Irish people to a spineless tailing of the British ruling class.

## SUMMARY

We have argued throughout this pamphlet that the only way forward for Irish and British workers on the question of Ireland is to demand: *Immediate withdrawal of British troops and Immediate recognition of the right of the Irish people as a whole to determine their own future.* The Communist Party of Great Britain, the TUC and the Tribune group, as we have seen, have different ideas, ideas which are wrong and dangerous but ideas which reflect the thinking of significant sections of the labour movement. We call on the comrades of the CPGB and on those who support or sympathise with its position to give clear answers to the following questions.

1. Do you accept that the division of the capitalist world into oppressed and oppressor nations is the essence of imperialism? That therefore a central demand for all socialists is the right of oppressed nations to self-determination—immediately and without conditions?
2. Do you accept that the army is the armed force of the bourgeois state and cannot either defend democracy or act in the interests of the working class—Irish or British?

3. Do you accept that the struggle for self-determination is the *only* way to achieve unity on a *working class* basis in Ireland?
4. Do you accept that as socialists we cannot reject the struggle for self-determination 'right down to an uprising or war', whatever form it takes and despite the fact that it is not led by socialists?
5. Do you accept that sectarianism is not the result of hard-faced reactionary mismanagement but has a real material basis embodied in the partition of Ireland? That this sectarianism can only begin to be broken down when partition has been abolished and the loyalists can no longer look to the British state to prop up their ascendancy?
6. Do you accept that the call for a Bill of Rights is a denial of the right of the Irish to self-determination? That as socialists we have no right to decide when the Irish are 'ready' for political independence?
7. Do you accept that the demands for immediate withdrawal and self-determination for the Irish express the political independence of the British working class and therefore represent their class interests?
8. Do you accept that the call for a Bill of Rights ties the working class to its own ruling class, weakens its independence and therefore goes against its class interests?

These questions are all serious questions for the working class. The British labour movement must take up the debate on these issues to forge the clarity and programme that will defend its own interests and those of the Irish people. The RCG has invited the CPGB to take part in this debate to no avail. Gerry Cohen of the CPGB replied:

'Thank you for your letter proposing a public debate on the Irish question. We do not wish to accept this proposition, as we do not feel it would be the most helpful way of making a contribution to the development of a campaign on this issue.' (Letter to the RCG 29 Jan 1976.)

But it is clearly in the interest of the labour movement to have this debate. Otherwise there is only the 'debate' of the ruling class to turn to—a debate about how best to oppress the Irish and keep the British workers under at the same time. The interests of the working class are best defended by theoretical and political clarity—only the ruling class gains from a working class silence on Ireland. Therefore we call on the comrades of the CPGB and all the other sections of the labour movement who disagree with our views to enter into this debate in the interests of the British labour movement and of the Irish people.

**Revolutionary Communist Group**  
March 1976

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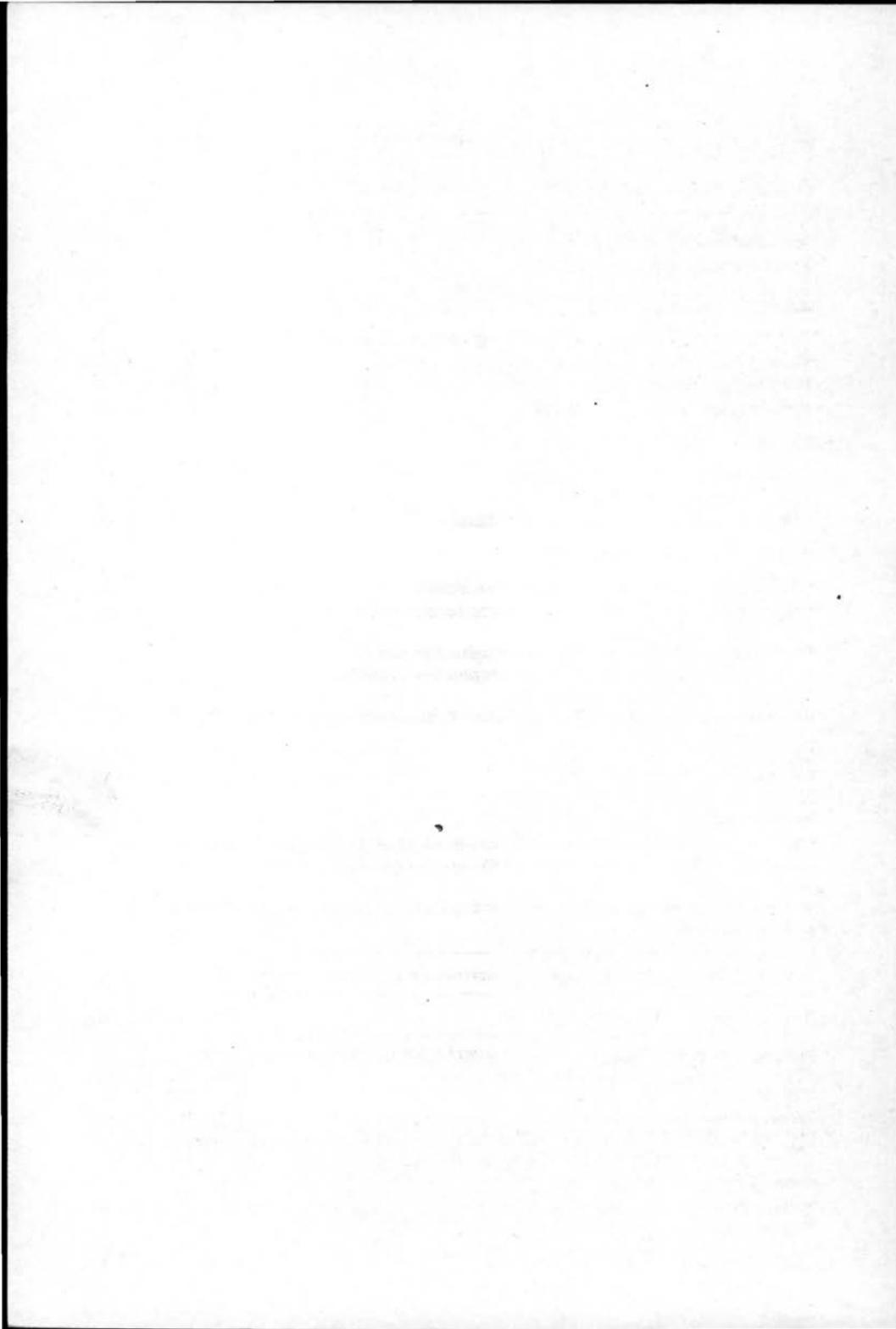
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Published by RCG Publications Ltd,  
49 Railton Rd, London SE24 0LN.

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