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Soviets condemn Provisional IRA

A major condemnation of the Provisional IRA has appeared here in the current Soviet issue of the Prague-based journal "Problems of Peace and Socialism, a Soviet-controlled monthly for the world communist movement. The condemnation comes in a joint article entitled "Irish Communists and Terrorism", specially written for the purpose by Michael O'Riordan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland and Betty Sinclair, a member of the Party's National Executive Committee. The journal^{published} is in thirty languages and circulates in 145 countries. But the individual languages issues are not always identical in content as was exemplified last year when a French language issue failed to carry a militant article which would have harmed the image of the PCF. The reproduction of this article in a Russian language issue therefore has the significance that it represents a deliberate move by the Soviets to express approval of the views expressed in the article.

Terrorism, the article says, is an almost daily occurrence on a world-wide scale and takes various forms: murders, bombings, hijackings (including trains as in Ireland), and (in an obvious reference to the Herrema case) the taking of hostages. In Ireland's case, we are told, there has been

historically a "passion for violence" born of a desire to shake off British rule. But, the article points out, the first major manifestation of this in modern times with the policy of "individual terror" of the Fenian movement, was criticised by Marx and Engels although they admired the personal courage of the Fenians. Like the good Marxists they are the authors of the article have a universal explanation for terrorism in any part of the world. Quoting Lenin ("What is to be done") they find it to be the inevitable outcome of one of his greatest and most renowned political aversions, "spontaneity", a typically "petty bourgeois" frame of mind which equally generated the revisionist evil of "economism" (waiting for history to fulfill Marx's prophecy instead of giving history a good push).

But, as the authors are only too well aware, this kind of vague generalising doesn't cast much light on anything.

Thus, having got the generalised liturgical obeisance to Lenin out of the way they get down to brass tacks as regards namely, the Provisionals the rise of whom is described as follows. what is really on their minds, / Widespread discrimination in Northern Ireland as from 1920, the article says, in an admission which Soviet readers will find revealing, "led to alienation between the Catholic and Protestant workers", and the result was many campaigns of "individual terror" by the IRA (especially from 1956 to 1962) operating "completely detached from the struggle of the workers" for their democratic rights. But the IRA got only "insignificant support" from the Catholic "minority" (the article makes clear there are around a million Protestants to be reckoned with) and its leaders started to study Connolly, Lenin "and other Marxists

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As a result the IRA began to reflect on the "social side of the affair" and socialism in general, forming at the end of the 1960's an alliance with the Communists and "other progressive forces" in the Association for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland.

But a part of the IRA leadership was infected by "petty bourgeois ideas" in urging continued use of force and terror and in "entirely denying the significance of mass struggle, the mass movement of toilers, in which the working class [sc. the Communist Party] would play the leading role". At the same time they considered themselves to be an "elite" who could do all this alone leaving it to the people themselves to decide what kind of country they wanted.

The article indirectly links the Irish Government with the rise of the Provisionals. For not only Stormont but also the Dublin Government saw a "threat" in the "mass movement" uniting socialist republicans and communists which could spill over into the South. Dublin therefore offered £100,000 to the IRA to defend the Catholics of Belfast. While the IRA rejected this "unprincipled" offer the future leaders of the Provisionals "agreed with it" and the new group emerged into the open in 1970.

The article then condemns at length the tactics of the Provisionals who proclaimed that they would attack only the Armed Forces. But, in fact the victims of their bombing attacks have been "mainly the civilian population".

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Factories, shops, buildings and dwelling houses have been the targets of their bombings. Many workers have lost their livelihoods, the article says, spelling this out in detail, while studiously refraining from giving one statistic on the cost in human lives. Perhaps the Provisionals console themselves with the thought that they are making conditions "intolerable" for the "occupationists", charges the article, but the fact is that it is the "ordinary people who are suffering most from the terror and its social consequences". The tactics of the Provisionals seem to be "murder for the sake of murder", all the more so as they do not have any "thought-out programme of demands, no idea of what kind of Ireland they want and for the sake of which they shed blood with such frivolity - both theirs and especially others". Instead, they rush "from one extreme to another". One day they say they are no longer thinking of a united Ireland and are prepared to give the Unionists not six but the nine counties of Ulster. The next day they talk about wiping Belfast from the face of the earth stone by stone.

The political consequences of the Provisionals tactics are seen as disastrous. Firstly, a violent Protestant backlash has been generated. Referring to the 1975 Party Congress the article points out that the Provisionals' terror campaign has "catastrophically deepened the split among the population". And citing Claud Cockburn (Irish Times of 8 June 1976) it points to the "fanning of

secretarian passion". This mobilises support for the Unionist ultras who are able to "strengthen their reactionary positions among a part of the Protestant working class on a sectarian basis".

Secondly, the Provisionals' policy helps to widen the influence of "certain opportunist leaders" of the SDLP among the Catholic workers.

Thirdly, public sympathy is aroused for proponents of law and order, as was particularly evident on the occasion of the murder of the British Ambassador in Dublin: "all the sympathy of the public was immediately on the side of the victims of terror and in the final analysis - on the side of the British administration".

The authors of the article are aware of a polemical objection to be overcome. It is true, they concede (stating a long-standing Soviet view), that the "true initiators and perpetrators of terror" have been "British imperialism and its Unionist allies". The sharpshooters and dynamiters of the IRA have been therefore "simply seeking to return blow for blow". But, admonishes the article, just as the British actions solve nothing, neither do those of the Provisionals. The tension cannot be discharged by "counter-escalation" of violence which affects the civilian population in the first instance and simply deepens "sectarian divisions". The Provisionals' violence must be "terminated unconditionally as harmful to the cause of the Irish people".

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The significance of the article lies in the fact that it represents the first systematic and ideological condemnation of the Provisionals published in a mass circulation medium in the Soviet Union, for the journal will be found on sale at all the major newspaper kiosks throughout the country. The article can therefore be taken as a major shift in the Soviet attitude towards the Provisionals. For up to now the role of the Provisionals in the violence in the North has, with some rare exceptions (e.g. Komsomolskaya Pravda), been consistently fudged and the blame for the mounting violence laid exclusively at the door of the British and the Protestant ultras with whom they have been depicted as working in hand-in-glove. And another element which Soviet readers will find entirely new is the idea^{that} there is^a sectarian gulf between the Catholic and Protestant workers. Up to now this aspect has been muffled, indeed, for the most part, totally suppressed, and the impression conveyed has been that British military action has been directed as much against ordinary Protestant workers as Catholic ones.

What has determined the timing of the article is not clear. But the article remarks almost incidentally but perhaps revealingly:

"in both parts of Ireland and also in Britain legislation against terrorism has been introduced which represents a serious threat for all democratic forces".

Does the Irish party consider that the further legislation recently introduced could some day be used against it?


It is all the more paradoxical therefore that the article should go out of its way to re-affirm a commitment (now being discarded by other West European parties) - the old-style Leninist brand of violence which is worth quoting at length:

"In condemning the petty-bourgeois extremism which has blossomed so profusely in Northern Ireland, we communists do this not from lack of revolutionary decisiveness or an insufficiency of boldness in coming out for a just cause with arms in hands when this is necessary. No, something different is involved - our responsible attitude towards the struggle is the interest of the working class and for the national goals of all the people. From the bitter Irish experience we became convinced long ago of the correctness of the conclusion of V. I. Lenin that 'individual terrorists' actions are inappropriate methods of political struggle'. Marxists, Lenin wrote, do not deny in the least the



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principle of violence and terror in relation to the class enemy without which no revolution takes place, but they are for such forms of revolutionary violence as are carried out with the direct participation of the masses. He never tired of stressing that 'only a mass movement can be regarded as a genuine political struggle. Only in a direct immediate link with a mass movement can and should individual terrorist acts be of value'. From our point of view this is the only correct way of posing the question, it being a humane and decisive one at one and the same ^{and} and free from the cruelty proper to adverturism and from pacifist sponeness". (Emphasis supplied in original).


Ambassador

Note:

The English language issue should normally be available in around a month's time.