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# ARGUMENTS FOR WITHDRAWAL

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LABOUR COMMITTEE  
ON IRELAND  
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# LABOUR PARTY POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND



The Labour Party's present policies on Northern Ireland are encapsulated in the National Executive Committee (NEC) Statement on Northern Ireland presented to, and overwhelmingly accepted by, the 1981 Labour Party national conference. Compiled by an NEC sub-committee, set up after the 1979 national conference, the declared goal of the Statement was "to formulate a clear, credible, socialist policy on Northern Ireland," (1)\* based on the "long and deeply-held belief in the Labour Party that Ireland should, by peaceful means, and on the basis of consent, be united and the recognition that this will be achieved with the introduction of socialist policies." (2)

By way of introduction to an analysis of the Statement's contents, it is therefore worthwhile outlining the Party's approach to Ireland since its origins, particularly in view of the Statement's claim that "the view in the Labour Party that our policy should be based on the objective of unity between the two parts of Ireland goes back to at least 1918." (3) If true, that claim would certainly mark no small achievement on the part of the Labour Party - partition, leading to the creation of "two parts of Ireland"-did not occur until three years after 1918.

In its earliest years, the Labour Representation Committee/Labour Party rejected calls from, amongst others, the Social Democratic Federation, that it should support a policy of full independence for Ireland, in favour of falling in behind support for 'Home Rule'. The latter was the demand of the Fabians within the Labour Party and the Liberals and Irish Parliamentary Party outside of it.

The Fabians backed Home Rule, which they generally saw merely as a form of decentralised local government, because "the (Irish) people are charming but we detest them, as we should the Hottentots, for their very virtues. Home Rule is an absolute necessity in order to depopulate the country of this detestable race." (4) The Liberals and equally bourgeois Irish Parliamentary Party supported Home Rule as necessary for the development of a more efficient, more profitable capitalism in Ireland.

The Labour Party's support for Home Rule often brought it into conflict with the Irish Trades Union Congress (ITUC). Thus, Party leaders McDonald and Henderson rejected the ITUC request that the political levy collected by British unions from members in Ireland should be paid into the newly formed Irish Labour Party rather than the British one. McDonald and Henderson wanted the ITUC&LP to be a branch of the British organisation, not an independent body in favour of an independent Ireland.

Given the Party's support for Home Rule rather than full independence, it comes as no surprise that the 1916 Easter Uprising was roundly condemned by the Labour Party. "There was no Labour leader in this country who did not deplore the recent rebellion in Ireland" (5) wrote J. H. Thomas, whilst the "Daily Herald" declared that "no lover of peace can do anything but deplore the outbreak in Dublin." (6)

In 1918 a Labour Party national conference discussed, albeit briefly, the question of Ireland for the first time in the Party's history. The resolution put forward by the Party leadership (and so approvingly quoted in the NEC Statement) called on conference to "recognise the claim of the people of Ireland to Home Rule and to self-determination in all exclusively Irish affairs." (7) An amendment to re-

\*Footnotes and references at end of pamphlet.



move the phrase "in all exclusively Irish affairs", which obviously made a mockery of the supposed commitment to self-determination, was defeated.

At the 1920 Labour Party conference it was a different story. As a reaction against the repression then being carried out by the British state in Ireland (e.g. 'Black and Tans' etc.) and in line with the general radicalisation of the British working class in these years (e.g. formation of Councils of Action to oppose imperialist intervention in the Soviet Union), the 1920 conference rejected the notion of support for self-determination only for "exclusively Irish affairs" and passed a resolution demanding "that the principle of free and absolute self-determination shall be applied immediately in the case of Ireland." (8)

Having failed to prevent this from becoming Party policy, the Parliamentary Labour Party then proceeded to ignore it, in particular by 'supporting' Irish self-determination only if there was no danger of the island becoming a military or naval threat to Britain's defences. Some members of the PLP went even further. Its chairperson, William Adamson, informed Parliament that "I do not believe in their heart of hearts they (the Irish) really want a republic" (9) and that "the Labour Party do not believe in an Irish Republic." (10)

A subsequent special party conference on Ireland (December, 1920) re-asserted the notion of 'partial self-determination', passing a resolution supporting "whatever constitution for Ireland and Irish people desire, subject to only two conditions, that it affords protection to minorities, and that the constitution should prevent Ireland from becoming a military or naval menace to Great Britain." (11)

For nearly half a century after this, the question of Northern Ireland, the statelet created by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 which had been openly welcomed by the Parliamentary Labour Party, remained to all extents and purposes a non-issue as far as the Labour Party was concerned. One would search in vain for any evidence of a "long and deeply-held belief" that Ireland should be united. In fact, the one occasion between the early twenties and late sixties that Northern Ireland did become an issue, the action of the then Labour government ran directly contrary to the idea of Irish unity.

This occasion occurred in the wake of the Southern Irish government's decision to leave the Commonwealth and declare a republic. The response of the Labour government was to introduce the Ireland Bill in May, 1949. Clause 1(1)B of the Bill read: "Parliament hereby declares that Northern Ireland remains part of His Majesty's Dominions and of the United Kingdom and affirms that in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be part of His Majesty's Dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland." (12)

An amendment to deny the Bill a second reading was defeated by 317 votes to 14, only eight of which came from Labour MPs. Other amendments were similarly overwhelmingly defeated, and the Bill had become an Act by June of the same year. The



REBEL VIL-LION

### THE FENIAN-PEST.

HIBERNIA: "O my dear sister, what are we to do with these troublesome people?"

BRITANNIA: "Try isolation first, my dear, and then -"

From: "Punch", 1866

enactment of such a Bill by the Labour government was not merely a denial of the idea of full independence for Ireland, or even the old notion of 'partial self-determination' for Ireland; it represented a Parliamentary sanctioning of the Unionist veto. It is difficult to see how it served "the objective of unity between the two parts of Ireland."

Although there were slight stirrings of interest in Ireland again in the mid-sixties, with Wilson meeting Northern Irish Prime Minister O'Neill and with the formation of the predominantly Labour Party based and oriented Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, it was only in the late sixties, when the question of Northern Ireland became impossible to avoid, that the Labour again, after a fashion, debated out the question.

The mainstream outlook in the Party was to see the solution, like the situation itself, in purely economic and social terms. The problem was poverty, the solution money. Willie Hamilton encapsulated that outlook when he declared, at the 1969 Labour Party conference, "our solution, the solution of a socialist party, must be to eradicate poverty. ... It means more public investment, it means more intervention by the government." (13) What underpinned such an approach was the attempt to cram the events taking place in the Six Counties into a framework of ideas drawn from the traditions and history of the British labour movement. But the very nature of the Northern Ireland statelet condemned such an approach to failure. Even so, such a perspective remained the dominant one in the Labour Party, and the trade unions, for over a decade. Arguably, it still is the predominant perspective.

Only in the late seventies did a challenge begin to emerge from within the Labour Party to this outlook and the policies being put into practice by the then Labour government. The challenge found open expression at the 1979 Labour Party conference, when the attempts of the Conference Arrangements Committee to prevent discussion of the motions on Ireland which had been submitted were defeated. Although the pro-withdrawal resolutions were themselves defeated, the arguments were now at least beginning to be raised and be given a hearing. (14) And it was at that conference also that the NEC pledged itself to setting up a sub-committee over the following twelve months to examine the Party's policies on Ireland, a decision which culminated, if that is the appropriate word, in the production of the 1981 NEC Statement on Northern Ireland.

Even this brief outline of the Party's history on the question of Northern Ireland shows how far-fetched are the NEC Statement's claims of "a long and deeply-held belief" in Irish unity and of a long tradition of believing that Party policy "should be based on the objective of unity between the two parts of Ireland". If there is little in the Party's overall history to encourage the belief that the NEC study group would produce a credible policy docu-

## Peace with Ireland.

### Labour's Proposals for a Settlement by Consent.

The National Executive of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party have enunciated an alternative policy to that which is being pursued by the present Government to the deep dishonour of the British nation.

On the occasion of the third reading of the Government of Ireland Bill in the House of Commons on November 11, 1920, the Labour Party submitted, in the name of the British Labour Movement, the following proposals for the settlement of the Irish problem by agreement:—

- (a) That the British Army of Occupation be withdrawn.
- (b) That the question of Irish Government be relegated to an Irish Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of proportional representation by free, equal, and secret vote.
- (c) That the Constitution drawn up by the Assembly be accepted, provided—
  - (1) It affords protection to minorities; and
  - (2) Prevents Ireland becoming a military or naval menace to Britain.

### Irish Labour supports British Labour's Peace Policy.

These proposals, which represent the policy of British Labour, have received the approval and endorsement of Irish Labour. On November 16, 1920, a National Conference of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress unanimously adopted a resolution declaring on behalf of the Irish Labour Movement its readiness to advocate the acceptance of this policy as being the fulfilment of Ireland's demand for the right to choose and decide its own form of Government.

The National Conference assured the British workers that the realisation of the policy outlined would lead to goodwill and fraternity between the two peoples.

**THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY IS NOT WELCOMED BY A SINGLE SECTION OF THE IRISH PEOPLE.**

**BRITISH LABOUR'S POLICY HAS BEEN ADOPTED BY IRISH LABOUR AND WILL LEAD TO GOODWILL AND FRATERNITY.**

LABOUR PARTY LEAFLET, 1920



ment, then there is even less in the more immediate background to the production of the 1981 Statement.

Secretary of the study group responsible for the Statement's production was Dick Barry. His politics can be gleaned from a document he had written five years previously, when he was the Party's chief research officer on Northern Ireland. In it he had complained of "the considerable support within the labour movement for expelling the British Army from Northern Ireland" (15), denounced Connolly's Irish Citizens' Army as "nationalist and class collaborationist", claimed that "anti-Catholic discrimination was not a Unionist policy" and favourably contrasted the "Protestant democrats (who) got on with the job of pursuing their class interests and seeking parliamentary reform within the United Kingdom" with the "Irish nationalist or 'republican' movement (which) was specifically ... concerned to promote the social power of the Catholic Church."

Barry was meant to share the secretaryship of the study group with David Lowe, more sympathetic to the idea of a united Ireland. In practice though, Lowe was carved out by Barry and, in July, 1980, ended up writing to Alex Kitson (chairperson of the study group) complaining that he had been deliberately excluded from a delegation to Southern Ireland.

The study group went through the motions of consulting the Party membership in drawing up the final document. A consultative paper, in the form of a questionnaire, drafted by Barry, was drawn up and circulated to CLPs for the submission of contributions. But the time allowed for this process was so short that proper discussion on the consultation paper became impossible in many CLPs. Nor was the paper itself free of bias.

The introduction to the paper, for example, referred to Northern Ireland "becoming part of the United Kingdom following the 1920 Government of Ireland Act" but failed to mention the background to that Act, just as it failed to say anything about why the troops were sent in 1969 and who sent them. Space was given over to quote the result of a 1973 referendum in which 99% of the votes cast were in favour of Northern Ireland staying in the UK. The consultative paper omitted to state that the referendum was boycotted by the SDLP and republican/nationalist bodies.

On the question of civil rights, the consultative paper glossed over the failures of the Fair Employment Act of 1976 and covered up for the previous Labour government by claiming that it had "immediately" set up an enquiry into allegations of ill-treatment at the Castlereagh detention centre in 1979, whereas the government had in fact long ignored such allegations.

When it came to the issue of how the "Province" should be governed, the paper put forward a variety of options, all of which rested on the assumption that Britain had the right to govern the Six Counties. The only exception to this was the option of Irish unification, but this was emotively described as "seeking approval for the expulsion of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom". The paper failed also to take up the role of the Army in Northern Ireland, the sectarian nature of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, did not even mention the Ulster Defence Regiment and suggested that the most sensible thing would be for the Army to be gradually replaced by the police fulfilling the same role, i.e. the policy of 'Ulsterisation' (dealt with below in more detail).

Of those submissions which were sent in in response to the circulation of the consultative paper, the majority argued for some form of withdrawal. But they made little impact on the study group. Concannon, the former Labour spokesperson for Northern Ireland, stood firm against the idea of a united Ireland, whilst Barry and Kitson succeeded in overturning a decision of the study group to oppose the extension of Labour Party organisation to Northern Ireland, though this in its turn was later overturned as well.

The NEC Statement on Northern Ireland, for which the work of the study group had provided the basis, was presented to the 1981 Labour Party conference. It was accepted, whereas resolutions calling for British withdrawal and unconditional self-determination for Ireland as a whole were heavily defeated. The Statement's overall philosophy was summed up in the introductory statement: "whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, it is clear that the stage has now been reached where a new initiative ... is urgently needed." (16) But the failure to analyse the "rights and wrongs of the situation" left the Statement hanging in mid-air, devoid of any understanding of the origins of the present situation or any set of principles upon which to base its conclusions, whilst the "new initiative" it

promised revealed itself to be so hemmed in by qualifications as to be little more than a vague wish.

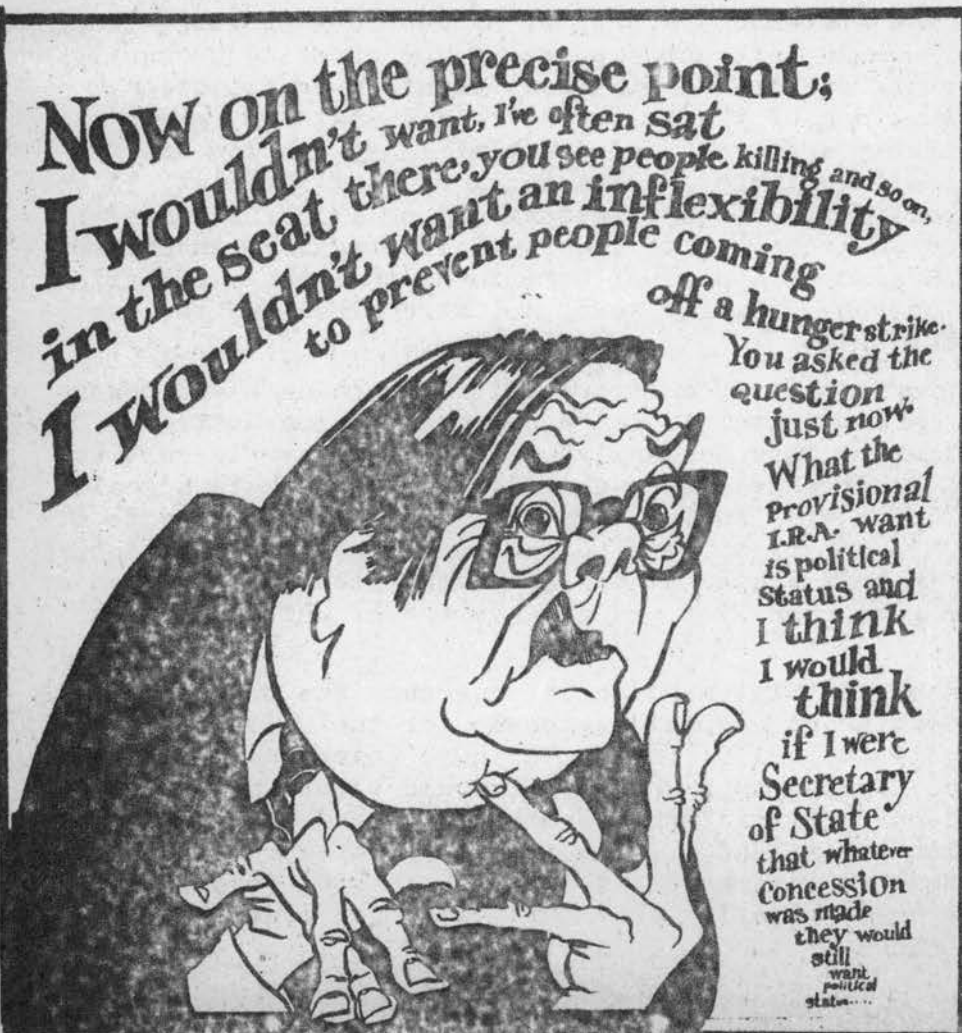
The Statement opened up with an examination of "possible constitutional structures for Northern Ireland", not bothering to stop to ask the question of whether the Labour Party/future Labour government had any right in the first place to determine the constitutional standing of the Six Counties. Three of these "possible constitutional structures" were quickly disposed of by the Statement: devolved government ("Success of devolved government depends upon it receiving the confidence and support of a substantial cross-section of both communities. This is obviously not present in Northern Ireland and for that reason we must reject it" (17)); negotiated independence for Northern Ireland ("No ultimate guarantee of the protection of minority rights would, in practice, exist. ... Economically, it would be very difficult for an independent state to survive without substantial outside help. ... It is inconceivable that public opinion in Britain would allow a Westminster government to heavily support an independent state for that length of time" (18)); and a confederation of the British Isles ("We concluded that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to achieve. ... We do not believe, therefore, that confederation is likely to bring peace and reconciliation to Ireland, and we must reject it" (19)).

The Statement then proceeded to describe the "way forward", by opting for three different "possible constitutional structures": direct rule from Westminster, power-sharing devolved government, and Irish unification. These three options, the Statement stressed, "should not be seen as separate alternatives. Instead, they should be seen as an integral part of a practical political programme, with one set of arrangements giving way, as soon as possible, to another." (20)

In no way, therefore, did the Statement's proposals amount to a bold advocacy of Irish unification, though they were often presented in such terms both in the media and the Labour Party itself. The Statement contained no more than a vague and nebulous commitment to Irish unification at some undetermined point in the future, with maintenance of the status quo plus a few palliative reforms as the policies for the here and now. Nor are there any grounds for believing that the "constitutional structures" proposed by the Statement as leading the way to unification would in fact lead in such a direction by achieving the Statement's

shorter term goal of securing "peace and reconciliation initially, between the two communities in Northern Ireland." (21)

Direct rule is glorified by the Statement's claim that under it "both Labour and Conservative governments have generally acted to defend the rights of all sections of the community in Northern Ireland." (22) But there has been no lessening of repression since the introduction of direct rule in 1972; if anything, it has become even more severe. And the impact of direct rule on discrimination can be judged by reference to a National Council for Civil Liberties report on Northern Ireland: "Has it (i.e.: anti-discrimination legislation) worked? Not a bit of it! ... Not only do the old patterns of discrimination still exist but it is becoming even more





# Who's doing well out of the troubles?

While thousands of people are being thrown out of work by violence, living in fear of violence — some people are living high.

The men of violence are feathering their own nests by extortion, robbery and murder.

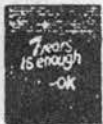
It could be different — we can restore, through the rule of law, more freedom and hope for the future.

Where all our efforts and resources go into the search for new investments and more jobs.

Where we are able to enjoy the better things in life.

IT'S OUR CHOICE — BUT...

## 7 years is enough



Northern Ireland Office (NIO) poster campaign, November 1976

particularly from Dick Barry's "Protestant democrats"). Nor does the Statement explain how a power-sharing devolved government could be achieved in the light of the fact that, as the Statement itself points out, "there has been very little movement in recent years towards establishing a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland." (25) The sorry saga of the Tories' Northern Ireland Assembly, set up after the Statement's appearance, should serve as a further warning against entertaining the illusions of the Statement's authors in power-sharing government.

A major argument advanced by the Statement in support of the idea of power-sharing devolved government is that it would "attract support of the minority community for the institutions of the state and ensure its involvement in constitutional politics." (26) But the institutions of the Northern Ireland statelet, given its origins and nature, are inevitably sectarian and discriminatory, as too are the "constitutional" politics operating within the framework of that statelet. To work for "minority community" support for such institutions and politics is therefore tantamount to asking Catholics to acquiesce to discrimination against themselves. It also runs contrary to the Statement's nominal commitment to Irish unification: the latter could be achieved only by breaking down, not strengthening, the institutions of the Orange statelet.

The Statement's three-stage progression from direct rule through devolved power-sharing to Irish unification is a movement from the concrete to the abstract. Direct rule is described as "the short term necessity" which "will have to continue for the time being" (27), whilst devolved power-sharing is a "medium-term goal" for which the Statement "would not wish to lay down hard and fast rules as to its structure and composition" (28), and Irish unification is relegated to the future for "it is not our intention in this statement to lay down a step-by-step plan or timetable for the next Labour government for the achievement of unification by consent." (29)

An even more important aspect of the Statement which undercuts the professed goal of Irish unification is the continuing support expressed for the Unionist veto, i.e., the 'right' of the inbuilt 'majority' in the North to determine the future constitutional developments of Ireland as a whole. "It would be no part of the political programme of the Labour Party to force Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom or into the Republic of Ireland ... the people of Northern Ireland will not be expelled from the United Kingdom against their wishes" (30) declares the Statement, whilst in the same breath stating that this "must not mean a veto on political development in the hands of the Unionist leaders." (31)

But this is no more than playing at semantics. To make Irish unification dependent

more difficult for Catholics in Northern Ireland to find employment. ... The crucial areas of repressive laws have not only remained as they were, they have got worse." (23) Given this record of twelve years of direct rule, the NEC's claim that a continuation of it "may be no bad thing" (24) and that it would represent the initial stage of a development towards Irish unification is without substance.

Equally starry-eyed and inaccurate is the Statement's presentation of devolved power-sharing government, which it declares to be "our medium-term goal". Passing reference is made to the dead-at-birth power-sharing administration of 1974, though without any explanation of why it failed (lack of support -

on the wishes of an artificially created "majority" in Northern Ireland is, in effect, to place a veto on political developments in the hands of the Unionist leaders. Moreover, the Statement's pledge that the Labour Party should "begin ... political discussions with all the interested parties, even if there is outright hostility from these Unionists leaders" (32) and that it "will campaign actively to win that consent for peaceful unification" (33) has, as evidenced by the history of the last three years since the Statement's appearance, remained a dead letter.

With regard to the Statement's conclusions about "possible constitutional structures" for Northern Ireland, there is therefore little to distinguish them from the policies of the present Tory government: continue with direct rule, make efforts towards the establishment of devolved power-sharing, and guarantee perpetuation of the Unionist veto. The only difference is that the NEC Statement, unlike the Tories, sanctions all this in the name of "the objective of unity between the two parts of Ireland," in much the same way as the Tories sanction increasing unemployment in the name of reducing unemployment (some time in the future).

Having sorted out which constitutional structures are needed by Northern Ireland, the NEC Statement goes on to consider the questions of security, civil rights, political prisoners and Diplock Courts. Here too, the Statement continues the tradition of the bipartisan approach to Northern Ireland with the Tories, with only two partial exceptions: the Emergency Provisions Act of 1978 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1974.

"There is, in our view," explains the Statement, "a strong case for a fundamental review of the operation of the (Emergency Provisions) Act with a view to changing some of its operations and to provide for its ultimate replacement. ... We recommend that the review of the Act be given high priority." (34) The limited nature of this break with bipartisanship (if it can be considered as such at all) is reflected in the fact that the Statement does not call for outright abolition of the Act, but merely for its "review" and "ultimate replacement", though by what it should be replaced, or why it should be replaced, is never explained.

The Statement is, however, somewhat more direct in dealing with the Prevention of Terrorism Act: "We are not at all satisfied with the way that the provisions of the Act are carried out. Indeed we are not convinced that the Act itself is in fact necessary. It involves the infringement of civil liberty. ... We cannot accept that such legislation should continue in existence and we would, therefore, repeal this Act." (35)

All the more sad, therefore, that the Parliamentary Labour Party has so singularly failed to act in line with this section of the Statement. When the Prevention of Terrorism Act came up for its annual renewal in 1983, for example, the Labour Chief Whip, after consulting the then Party leader Foot, imposed only a two-line rather than a three-line Party whip. Over 100 MPs failed to turn up to vote against the Act's renewal in line with Party policy. These included most of the past/current (at that time) Party spokespersons on Northern Ireland: Don Concannon, Merlyn Rees, Roy Mason, Stan Orme and Tom Pendry. Nor has the National Executive Committee done anything to encourage local CLPs to campaign in defence of victims of the Act as long as it remains on the statute book.

These considerations apart, the overall approach of the Statement to the issue of 'security' was fundamentally one of 'more of the same' and 'business as usual'. The Statement's goal was a security policy which would "achieve a reasonable balance between the maintenance of law and order and the protection of civil rights." (36) The fact that "law and order" within the framework of Northern Ireland means the denial of civil rights, for at least one section of the population, as can be seen from the history of Northern Ireland both before and after 1969, is ignored by the NEC Statement. It was, after all, not concerned with "the rights and wrongs of the situation", merely with finding a "new initiative".

Had the Statement been more concerned with the "rights and wrongs of the situation" it might have avoided advocating an approach to 'security' which was neither new nor an initiative. The security policy advocated in the Statement was the one begun by the Labour government of 1974/79, that of 'Ulsterisation'. This involved reducing the role of the Army by increasing that of the indigenous security forces (Royal Ulster Constabulary, with the Ulster Defence Regiment as a reserve force), and attempting to deny any political aspects to the conflict, e.g., by the withdrawal of political status from political prisoners. Through the replacement of the Army by the police, plus appropriate accompanying measures, the British government could then present the conflict as one of ordinary criminality devoid of



any political content, in order to minimise the international repercussions of the situation in Northern Ireland.

But none of this is explained by the Statement. Instead, the purpose of Ulsterisation (though the word itself is never used) is described as "to gradually win acceptance of the police right across the community in Northern Ireland" (37) and the policy is declared to have been "successful in allowing a considerable reduction in the profile of troops in urban areas." (38)

Apart from misrepresenting the purpose of Ulsterisation, the Statement also misrepresents the overall growth of the security forces in that time. (The security forces are sympathetically described as "having a ... difficult job in very trying circumstances" (39) and the Statement stresses that its discussion of their role is carried out "without wishing to add to the allegations levelled against the security forces" (40).) The Statement contrasts the number of troops/UDR members active in 1972 with the figures for 1981 and points to the reduction in both cases of troops (cut by 10,000) and UDR (a fall of 500), thereby creating the impression that there has been an overall reduction in the size of the security forces. This is a fairly crude attempt at sleight of hand, in that it refers only to troops and UDR, not all branches of the security forces. The Statement would have been forced to draw a different conclusion had it made a more thorough examination of the relevant figures: "Since 1969, repression has been developed considerably. The military and paramilitary agencies of the state have rapidly grown in size and become much more sophisticated. ... The RUC alone has been increased by 268% ... If ancillary security agencies and personnel are included, this means that someone is employed in policing the 'troubles' for every 38 persons in Northern Ireland." (41)

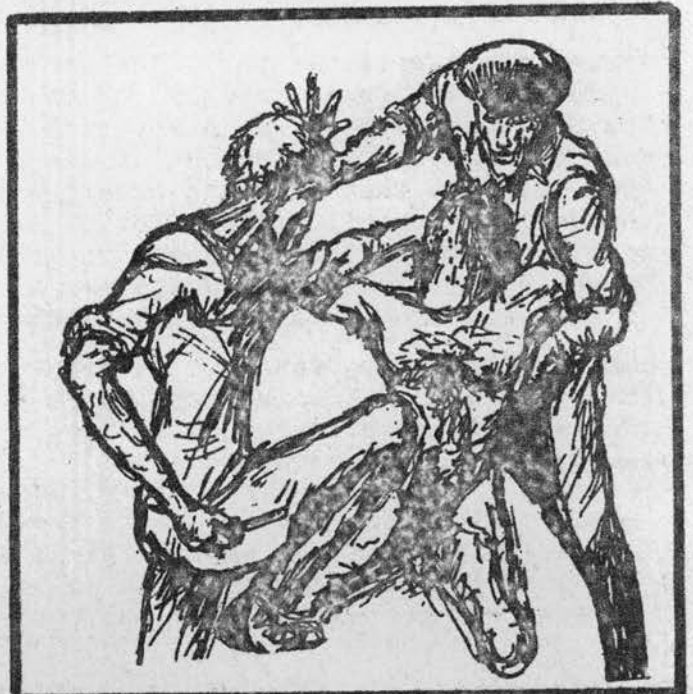
Whilst welcoming the reduction in the number of troops in Northern Ireland achieved by the policy of Ulsterisation, the Statement firmly opposed any idea of complete withdrawal of the troops: "In our view, this would only lead to an escalation of violence. It should be the duty of every government to protect the lives and property of all its citizens and this would not be served by such hasty and ill-prepared action." (42) Recalling Adamson's statement of 1920 that the Irish, in their heart of hearts, did not want a republic, the NEC Statement explained that whilst "there is some support inside the Labour Party for the early withdrawal of troops from Northern Ireland" (43), there was however "very little enthusiasm for such a move in Northern Ireland itself." (44)

That the Statement should oppose the "early withdrawal" of the troops is a reflection of how paper-thin its commitment is to Irish unification. How could the "objective of unity between the two parts of Ireland" be achieved without the withdrawal of British troops, and the various other manifestations of British intervention in Ireland? Direct rule is definitely on the cards for the next Labour government. Another sorry attempt at devolved power-sharing may be. But withdrawal of the troops, as far as the NEC Statement is concerned, most certainly is not.

This section of the Statement closes with an appeal to "all sections of the community to assist the work of the police in Northern Ireland in their struggle to establish law and order." (45) The same appeal is made virtually every day of the week by Jim Prior. Given the sectarian nature of both the police force and also 'law and order' in the Six Counties, members of the Catholic community could respond to such an appeal only by giving up their fight against Northern Ireland's inherently sectarian nature. But this consequence of their appeal does not seem to concern the authors of the NEC Statement.

The Statement's authors are equally unconcerned by the existence of the Diplock Courts (in which there is only a judge, no jury). Just as the fellow-travellers of the thirties had no problem justifying the Stalinist show-trials, so too the Statement can glibly declare that "we do not see any prospect of a return to ordinary trial by jury, so long as paramilitary and terrorist activity continues on the present scale."

(46)



The Statement opened by declaring itself the goal of "formulating a clear, credible, socialist policy on Northern Ireland". It did not take it long to end up endorsing the abolition of juries - in the best interests, it goes without saying, of justice. The Statement's coverage of the Diplock Courts amounts to a white-wash. There is no mention of the inequality of sentences handed out at the courts ("... where sentences of eight and ten years were being meted out ... it appeared that the former (i.e.: Catholics) were attracting a heavy sentence for less serious offences than the latter (i.e.: Protestants)" (46)). Nor is there any mention of the phenomenon of case-hardening (i.e., the growing percentage of 'guilty' verdicts in cases where the defendant pleads innocence: "Northern Ireland judges have become much more reluctant to acquit in Diplock Courts than juries in jury trials. It should be emphasised here that the same judges sit in both forms of trial." (47)) So too, the use of Diplock Courts to try non-political/non-'terrorist' offences is ignored, whilst the evidence available showing the use of torture of various kinds to extract 'confessions' from those due to appear before Diplock Courts is referred to but no conclusions drawn.

Equally evasive is the manner in which the Statement takes up the question of H Blocks and the demand for political status for political prisoners. The demand for political status is misrepresented as a demand for "special privileges over and above those which exist for conforming prisoners in Northern Ireland." (48) Yet the prisoners had constantly stressed, as the authors of the document must have been aware, that their goal was not the material 'privileges' that went with the granting of their demand but rather it was to achieve open recognition of the fact that their 'crimes' had been of a political nature.

Nor does the Statement properly explain the basis upon which the prisoners and their supporters argued the prisoners' right to political status. The Statement reduces it to the argument that, since the prisoners had been through a special legal and judicial procedure before ending up in the H Blocks and Armagh Jail, they should therefore be given a special status in the prisons as well. This evades the much more central argument that the prisoners had been incarcerated for committing political 'crimes' and should therefore be accorded political status on that basis. But by failing to take up this aspect of the prisoners' arguments, the Statement can also avoid having to state whether or not it regards the prisoners' 'crimes' as being of a political nature.

Despite its inadequate treatment of this question, the Statement has no problem in concluding that "our views on political status are absolutely clear. We support the policy of treating them like other prisoners which was introduced by the last Labour government." (49) The Statement even goes further by declaring that "we believe the original decision to introduce it (political status) was wrong." (50)

To react to the policies advocated in the Statement on such issues as 'security', the Army, Diplock Courts, political prisoners etc. by merely dismissing them as evidence of the Statement's fundamental failure to get anywhere near the enunciation of a "socialist policy on Northern Ireland" is not enough. It is necessary to place such policy proposals within the overall context of the traditional

approach within the British labour movement to Northern Ireland, an approach which, as pointed out above, sees both the problem and the solution as an economic/social one. From such a point of view, the task of the security forces becomes one of defeating the 'terrorists' so as to allow for the implementation of traditional social-democratic reforms to deal with the economic problems which are seen as being at the root of the 'troubles'.

The Statement's policies on the question of 'security' are the logical outflow of such a perspective. The violence is not seen as the inevitable result of the inevitably undemocratic nature of the Six Counties 'statelet', but as an obstacle to solv-





ing the 'real' problems of bad housing, unemployment etc. Thus, looked at from such a point of view, it becomes necessary to break the Republican opposition in order to pave the way for social-democratic reformism, even if that means abolishing the very democratic rights (e.g.: trial by jury) which were achieved in this country only as a result of prolonged struggles by the labour movement.

Such an approach can only lead to bipartisanship and continuous repression. The NEC Statement merely codifies that approach and sanctions it in the name of "a clear, credible, socialist policy on Northern Ireland."

The other side of the repression is the prescription of traditional social-democratic remedies to deal with the economic and social problems. The Statement's general conclusion with regard to the post-1969 attempts to implement such remedies is that "many human rights provisions and reforms in social law have been introduced in the past ten years or so. ... This is an impressive list of achievements which indicates just what has, and can be done to strengthen civil rights in Northern Ireland." (51)

The question of discrimination/civil rights will be dealt with in a future pamphlet. It will explain why discrimination is inseparable from the very existence of Northern Ireland, why the denial of civil rights will continue to exist as long as Northern Ireland exists, and why, therefore, such an approach to these issues as that outlined in the NEC Statement is doomed to failure. Here it must suffice to run through the evidence provided by the Statement (such as it is - just 32 lines) in order to show that the accolade of "an impressive list of achievements" is totally unfounded. The Statement makes the following claims to justify its euphoric attitude towards the question of discrimination and civil rights:

- the creation of the post of a Commissioner for Complaints to deal with grievances against local councils and public bodies; but it is difficult to find evidence of this resulting in less discrimination by Loyalist-controlled local councils: "Sectarianism is alive and well in the councils ... where councils are dominated by Loyalists, the sectarianism of their politics has often been clear and open" (52);
- the imposition of penalties for incitement to hatred through the introduction of the Prevention of Incitement to Hatred Act (NI) of 1970; but only one person has ever been charged under this Act, a founder member of the Red Hand Commando charged for his involvement in the production of a Loyalist songbook containing refrains such as "you've never seen a better taig than with a bullet in his back", and he was acquitted anyway;
- the setting up of a police authority through the Police Act (NI) of 1970; but, after a lengthy study, barrister-at-law Dermot Walsh's conclusion was that "... (where continuous malpractices occur), then the onus is on the police authority to act. It has been seen, however, that it is quite content to allow the police a free hand in these matters and leave it to the government to take action when public concern becomes too difficult to ignore" (53);
- the death penalty for murder was formally abolished by the Emergency Provisions Act of 1973; but the operative word here - and the Statement uses it itself - is "formally" - undercover assassination, the shoot-on-sight policy, the use of plastic bullets etc. have all perpetuated the death penalty in Northern Ireland, and not just for murder;
- a Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights was set up in 1973; but the Statement fails to explain why it believes any Northern Ireland authorities would take any notice of this when Britain has continuously ignored similar bodies: since 1957, for example, Britain has, one way or another, been in continuous breach of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
- the Statement also quotes various pieces of nominally anti-discrimination legislation which have been placed on the statute book over the years; but their impact has already been dealt with through reference to the NCCL report of November, 1980.

Two other issues were looked at in the NEC Statement. One was that of Labour Party organisation in relation to Northern Ireland. Like the question of discrimination, this is an important topic in its own right, particularly since the main demand raised at the moment by "Militant" in relation to Northern Ireland is for the creation of a trade union-based Labour Party there, whilst the Campaign for Labour

Representation in Northern Ireland campaigns for the British Labour Party to extend its organisation to the Six Counties. Given, therefore, the extent to which the question of Labour Party organisation and Northern Ireland is a matter of controversy, an article in the next pamphlet will be given over to discussing it.

The remaining section of the NEC Statement to be looked is that taking up the "task of rebuilding the Northern Ireland economy." (54) To fulfill this goal, the Statement advocates the implementation of the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES) in Northern Ireland.

It is an approach which the Statement shares with the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions: "... whilst this document refers only to proposals for Northern Ireland, we regard them as being the application of the TUC'S AES to the social and economic problems of the Province." (55)

Implicit, if not explicit, in such an approach is the assumption that Northern Ireland is just another depressed region of Great Britain, like Merseyside or parts of Scotland. This obviously cuts across the Statement's supposed commitment to Irish unification. In addition, the economic policies outlined in the Statement fail to make any reference to discrimination: there is no mention, for example, of differential wage rates, different unemployment rates, regional imbalances within Northern Ireland, etc. For the Statement, discrimination is hived off into civil society rather than being recognised as a feature permeating all areas of Northern Irish society, particularly the economy. A genuine application of the AES to Northern Ireland would involve a policy of positive discrimination for Catholics. That the impact of the suggested economic policies contained in the NEC Statement on discrimination would be nil can be seen from earlier attempts to implement similar policies: "Clearly, regional policy has done little to reduce the marginality of the Catholic working class. ... 'Selling Northern Ireland' (i.e.: attempting to attract investments) does little to oppose sectarianism, ... unemployment and state intervention merely highlight the nature of sectarian class division. ... The capitalist state must manage rather than resolve existing divisions." (56)

At bottom, the economic policies advocated by the Statement are not a plausible set of policies to defend working class interests in the face of the impact of capitalist recession. The statement outlines general policies and general demands (major reflation, a coherent planning framework, extending public enterprise, active manpower policies, etc.) without explaining how they would be implemented, how they relate to the goal of Irish unification (which they obviously don't), and why they would promote working class interests when previous attempts to implement similar policies have failed so completely, e.g. the attempts to follow up the conclusions of the Quigley Report of 1976 (57).

The Statement's economic strategy thereby falls down on every front. Far from being the "radical socialist strategy for the Northern Ireland economy" (58) which it claims to be, the economic policy in the Statement is unrelated to the idea of Irish unification, does nothing to combat discrimination, and does nothing to effectively defend working class living standards from the ravages of capitalist crisis.

It is difficult to see how a Labour government implementing the policies contained in the NEC Statement would mark any break with the record of previous Labour governments. Direct rule and recognition of the Loyalist veto would remain. The Emergency Provisions Act would be replaced and the Prevention of Terrorism Act abolished, but the remaining battery of repressive legislation would remain intact. There would be no withdrawal of the troops, nor any implementation of effective economic policies in support of workers' struggles. Far from being a "clear, credible, socialist policy", the Statement is more a guarantee to continue past disasterous policies.

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### NORTHERN IRELAND

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# 'MILITANT' AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The politics of the 'Militant' tendency on Northern Ireland do not flow out of an analysis of the nature and peculiarities of the class struggle in the Six Counties and its relationship to the class struggle in the rest of Ireland. Rather, they follow on from the scenario of how Militant believes the class struggle in the Six Counties ought to be and ought to develop.

At the centre of Militant's scenario for Northern Ireland is an abstract notion of "workers' unity", reduced by Militant to a purely economic category: if workers are united on economic questions (e.g. jobs, wages, housing), then that is regarded as sufficient to justify claims as to the existence of "workers' unity". That workers may be divided on any number of other issues (in the context of Northern Ireland, the obvious one being the question of the Border, British Army etc.) is ignored.

Having so reduced the idea of "workers' unity" as to rob it of any meaning, Militant then proceeds to re-write history and re-jig the present so that they can be neatly inserted into Militant's scenario politics.

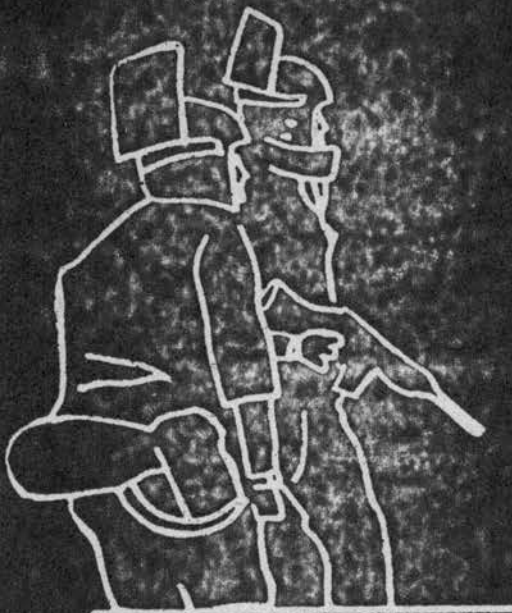
"Those who write off the ability of the workers to join together in struggle ... forget the splendid tradition of common struggle of the working class in Northern Ireland. Those traditions stand out in bold relief in any (!) history of the North" (1)\* claims the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) pamphlet "Northern Ireland - 'The Way Forward'" (hereafter referred to as TWF), which, given the Militant's domination of the LPYS, is merely a statement of Militant's politics on Northern Ireland.

But TWF advances only three examples to 'justify' the claim of a "splendid tradition of common struggle of the working class in Northern Ireland": the work of Larkin and Connolly in the 1907-11 period; the engineers' strike of 1919 for a shorter working week; and the Outdoor Relief Scheme strike and agitation of 1932. By any normal standards, three incidents in half a century do not add up to a "splendid tradition", and even less so a "splendid tradition ... in Northern Ireland" given that two of the three events took place before Northern Ireland even came into existence. Nor do the three examples given by TWF, once placed in their historical context, prove what Militant wants them to prove.

TWF fails to point out that the campaign for better wages and conditions which Larkin, as Belfast organiser of the British-based National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), led in 1907 was defeated, partly because of NUDL intervention over Larkin's head and partly because the military were able to isolate the Catholic workers on the Falls Road, killing three of them in the process. Connolly's subsequent work, contrary to TWF's claims, was equally thwarted by the lack of working class unity, e.g.: the Larne aluminium workers' strike of 1913, when the Irish TGWU was denounced from the pulpit as a "Papist organisation" and the strike defeated by the whipping up of sectarianism. Connolly's rare successes (the deep-sea dockers strike of 1911 and the creation of a "Non-sectarian Labour Band") were the exception, not the rule. But TWF inverts reality and presents them as the norm rather than the exceptional.

Moreover, the events of 1907 and 1911 took place in a context where William Walker, a leading member of Belfast Trades Council, president of the Irish TUC and leading member of the Independent Labour Party, had just stood as a candidate in a Parliamentary by-election in North Belfast and pledged that, if elected, he would "resist every effort to throw open the offices of the Lord Chancellor of England and the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to Roman Catholics", would "contend against every proposal to open diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the Court of St. James" and would "resist every attack upon the legislative enactments provided by our forefathers as necessary safeguards against the encroachment of the Papacy" (2). He also assured the Belfast Protestant Association that the trade union movement was "essentially Protestant" (3). And only a year after the "class

\*Footnotes and references at end of pamphlet.



# NORTHERN IRELAND

The Way Forward

**LABOUR PARTY YOUNG**

**SOCIALISTS PAMPHLET**

unity" of 1911, Belfast Trades Council withdrew from the Irish TUC because of its decision to set up its own Labour Party rather than continue to fall in behind the British one.

Nor is Militant on any firmer ground with its second example of a "splendid tradition of common struggle": the 1919 strike, when, TWF tells us, "Protestant and Catholic workers built a powerful united movement. ... Belfast was for a period of weeks a stronghold of a united class movement." (4) The crucial phrase here is "for a period of weeks". Only twelve months after the strike Belfast saw some of the worst pogroms in its history: 20,000 Catholics were expelled from their workplaces, and 455 people killed. The Irish TGWU almost collapsed completely in Belfast, whilst other Belfast union branches left Irish-based unions.

The same situation repeated itself in the early thirties. A brief period of joint activity between Protestants and Catholics in 1932 was followed by a return to sectarian hostilities: Catholics were again driven out of their jobs, particularly in the shipyards and linen mills, and twelve people killed, whilst Labour and trade union meetings were subject to harassment and physical attack. But TWF is silent about all this, as it has to be in order to attempt to construct a "splendid tradition of common struggle".

But Militant is nothing if not consistent. Having conjured up this "splendid tradition", Militant also attempts to impose it upon the post-1969 history of the Six Counties. Once

again, TWF can offer only three examples as 'justification' of its references to "workers' unity, 1969-1982" and "the basic unity of the working class in the trade union organisations on the shop and office floor." (5)

The first example is the emergence of the Better Life For All Campaign (BLC). A heart-warming picture is painted by TWF of a BLC conference at which "one thousand trade union activists warmly welcomed speeches calling for workers' unity, united action against sectarianism, and calls for political action and a Labour Party." (6)

But the BLC in reality was a different body from that suggested by the above quote. It was set up, controlled, and eventually put into cold storage by the Northern Irish trade union bureaucracy. It never attacked the British state's use of violence nor the Army's record of repression. Instead its calls for an end to violence were directed towards those who use violence to defend themselves and their ghettos against the violent repression of the British state. Very much a damp squib from beginning to end, the BLC's public activities were few and generally badly attended: only a few hundred turned up to what was meant to be a major rally in November, 1976.

Militant's second example is even more far-fetched: the Peace Women (later, Peace People). Like the BLC, the Peace Women's condemnation of violence was directed towards the Republican movement, not the British state. Hence their silence when a twelve-year old girl was shot by the Army on her way to mass, or when a fourteen year old boy was killed by a plastic bullet. On the other hand, they openly declared their support for the 'security forces' and deplored merely their "occasional breaches" of the law. Militant waxed lyrical at the emergence of the Peace Women: "The people of the Shankhill and the Falls have shown to the world that there is no difference between the two communities ... The Peace Women point at the guilty men in society. They point at the paramilitaries, particularly the Pro-



visionals." (7) Within a matter of months though, the Peace Women phenomenon had died away to nothing. The postscript to their story merely adds a touch of vulgarity. When Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, the leading Peace Women, were subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize these self-sacrificing individuals kept the prize money which went with it for themselves.

All this is passed over in silence by TWF. Instead, it claims that the BLC and the Peace Women were "a clear demonstration that the working-class people in Northern Ireland were tired of sectarian conflict and wished to isolate the sectarians." (8) Not even with the benefit of hindsight does TWF attempt to make a more accurate, more honest assessment of the BLC and the Peace Women. To do so would have undermined Militant's notion of a "splendid tradition of common struggle".

The final example presented by TWF as evidence of such a tradition since 1969 is the alleged defeat of the Paisleyites' Loyalist workers' stoppage of 1977: "The heroism of the organised working class caused Paisley's initiative to fail. The workers, united in their trade unions, dealt a heavy blow to the ambitions of the sectarian politicians and preserved intact their class organisations." (9) Would that it were true. The 1977 stoppage received more support in its opening days than the Loyalist workers' stoppage of 1974. Additional support did not materialise due to the then Labour government yielding to some of the basic demands being raised by the stoppage, particularly that of an expansion of the 'security forces'. The strike was not so much a victory or a defeat as superfluous - why strike when your central demand has been accepted anyway? In the aftermath of the stoppage, Paisley went on to emerge as the leading politician in the eyes of Loyalist workers.

(Mercifully, TWF refrains from providing a fourth example of class unity: 1969. Whilst everyone else was mesmerised by the rioting in the summer of 1969, Militant discovered class unity: "Even faced with section attack (what's that?), the Derry Labour Party found an eager response to the idea of appealing to the Protestant workers ... An opportunity has existed for appealing to Protestant workers." (10))

Despite Militant's brave efforts at re-writing history, its "splendid tradition of common struggle" remains shrouded in mystery. But to deny the existence of such a tradition is not to deny the need for class unity, between Protestants and Catholics, between workers North and South. Such unity cannot be achieved simply on the basis of economic demands, as the aftermath of 1919 or 1932 clearly demonstrates. It must involve unity in opposition to the Border, the British Army, plus a whole host of other issues which Militant ignores, both in Ireland and Britain. The task of socialists in Ireland is to fight for that class unity, without dropping issues such as the Border in the process. Militant fails to do this. Why fight for class unity if you believe, as Militant does, that it already exists? It is Militant's misconception about the nature of "working class unity" and its belief that it has always existed and still does now that renders the rest of Militant's politics on Northern Ireland as wrong and inadequate as their starting point.

Thus, Militant claims that there is no discrimination in Northern Ireland. Ironically, the only other people to make such a claim are Unionist politicians. One looks in vain for any mention of discrimination in the TWF. On the contrary, the



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## WILD SCENES IN BELFAST STREETS

### Six Persons Killed in Week of Terror

**SHOOTINGS AND  
BURNINGS**

**TENSE ATMOSPHERE IN  
THE CITY**

**TROOPS CALLED OUT**

*Military on Duty in Belfast Danger Area*



**PAY OF ARMY  
RESERVISTS**

**QUESTIONS IN  
THE DAIL**

**DRUMM BATTERY**

In the Dail on Wed. Mr. T. J. Murphy asked the Minister for Industry and Commerce whether he was aware that in the case of members of the Reserve Force, Grade A, he per week of their allowance was taken from arrears, for the purpose of reducing their expenditure.

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pamphlet declares that "both Protestant and Catholic workers endure the same conditions of mass unemployment and squalid housing. The crisis of capitalism and the cuts in living standards imposed by the Tories affect workers equally, regardless of religion." (11) Similarly, the 'Labour and Trade Union Group' (i.e.: Militant) candidate for East Belfast in the 1979 General Election claimed that "working class Protestants and working class Catholics have the same common problems." (12)

In fact, it would seem that discrimination never existed in Northern Ireland, or, if it did, only to such a negligible extent as to merit no more than a passing reference: "Unemployment used to affect the Catholic areas in the cities more severely than the Protestant areas." (13) (And note the use of the past tense.) Not even the violence of 1969 was anything to do with any fightback against sectarian discrimination; it was "against the system itself, the lengthening dole queues, the worst housing in Britain and misery on a mass scale. This anger against the capitalist system erupted in the insurrection." (14) The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was dismissed as "a bloc of Catholic oriented movements" of which the leaders were "incapable of putting a clear programme which could solve the real problems of the jobless slum-dwellers - Catholic and Protestant." ((15) - that's the thing about Militant: you may think you know what your problems are, but you can rely on them to tell you what your real problems" are.)

Militant can hardly be unaware of all the evidence and statistics showing that sectarian discrimination has always characterised Northern Ireland, and still does. So why does it deny its existence? It is one of the penalties which Militant has to pay to try to maintain intact its scenario of Irish politics. If sectarian discrimination did exist, then the logical outcome would be a divided working class. Militant in particular would draw such a conclusion, given its crudely economic, mechanistic approach to politics and political consciousness. But Militant's entire Northern Irish politics are predicated upon the notion of working class unity. In order to preserve its fiction of a "splendid tradition of common struggle", Militant therefore finds itself forced to write off various aspects of reality, in this case the existence of sectarian discrimination, where those aspects pose a threat to the plausibility, such as it is, of Militant's scenario politics.

The same logic explains why Militant misrepresents the nature of Northern Irish trade unionism. Rather than accept its reality, which would cut across Militant's notion of "class unity", Militant distorts that reality so that the trade union organisation can be crammed into its scenario politics.

Trade unionism in Northern Ireland, like everywhere else, developed along the lines of least resistance. In the context of a statelet based on the institutionalisation of sectarian discrimination this meant at least a passive acquiescence in that sectarian status quo, especially since it guaranteed privileges for a section of the trade union membership. The inevitable result of this was that the sectarianism of Northern Irish civil society found, and finds, its reflection in the trade union movement also.

But Militant argues that the trade unions stand above the sectarian divide: "At present they are the only non-sectarian movement in the country. They are the only body capable of converting the present struggle into a class struggle against the Tory government." (16) Militant likewise denies that the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions is, in practice, an independent body. Organisationally, the former is certainly a sub-section of the latter; but in its day-to-day functioning, it operates independently. Militant, however, claims that "the trade unions North and South are united in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions" (17) and inveighs against those who have "openly raised the demand for the Northern unions to be separated from the ICTU." (18)

Militant may be wrong. But at least it is consistently wrong. It starts off with the notion of "class unity" already being a realised reality. It proceeds from there to deny the existence of discrimination. And if there is no discrimination and no sectarian divisions, then logically the trade union movement must be a "non-sectarian movement" standing above the sectarian divide.

And Militant takes this logic further, by raising the demand for a trade union-based defence force: "The very real danger of widespread sectarian clashes poses in an acute form the need for some defence organisations embracing Catholics and Protestants alike" (19) for "the arming of the trade unions is a minimum step which is now necessary even to prevent the trade unions themselves being consumed by sectarian-



ism." (20)

(It should also be noted that the task allotted to this trade union defence force by Militant is to organise "defence against sectarian violence" and combat the "sectarian madmen intent on shooting workers going to and from work." (21) The question of fighting the British Army, still less the RUC and UDR, is not even mentioned.)

Refusing to recognise that Northern Irish trade unionism reflects Northern Irish sectarianism, so too Militant refuses to recognise that a defence force based on the trade unions would reflect that sectarianism to the same extent. The same applies to Militant's call for a trade union-based Labour Party in Northern Ireland, which, being a specifically Northern Irish Labour Party rather than an extension of the Southern Irish Labour Party, would involve a de facto recognition of partition.

In the early seventies Militant hoped for a metamorphosis of the now defunct Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) into a mass socialist party armed with Militant's bold socialist programme. In 1969 Militant argued that "for this programme (i.e., the bold socialist one) to take on flesh it needs to be put into practice by a united Labour movement committed to a socialist Ireland" (22) and called on the NILP to "take the initiative in calling a conference of all trade unions, Labour Parties to form this immediately." (23) And in 1971 Militant was warning that "to leave the party now would be a grave error." (24) Three years later, however, Militant itself left the NILP on the grounds that "the leadership of the NILP went over to a reactionary loyalist position in 1974." (25)

Since then Militant has been plugging the demand for a trade-union based Labour Party in Northern Ireland. As mentioned in the first article in this pamphlet, this issue will be taken up in a separate article in the next pamphlet. Here it will merely be shown how this demand flows out of Militant's claim that "class unity" exists in Northern Ireland.

TWF argues that "a Labour Party putting forward a socialist answer to the miseries imposed by capitalism would quickly become a major pole of attraction for workers and young people. It would give a political expression to the unity of the working class on the shop and office floors and within the trade unions." (26) Again, one finds as a starting point the "unity of the working class on the etc. and in the etc." From such a point of view, any Labour Party set up as a political expression of the trade unions and the working class as a whole would itself be the expression of a united working class. Thus, proceeding from the "splendid tradition of common struggle of the working class in Northern Ireland", Militant moves through a dismissal of the existence of discrimination and a glorification of Northern Irish trade unionism to arrive at the call for a trade union-based defence force and a trade union-based Labour Party.

But not everything can be so neatly slotted into Militant's scenario. Indeed, some things don't fit in at all, and Militant makes no attempt to fit them in either. This is particularly the case with the "sectarian killers", the umbrella term used by Militant to denote anyone carrying a gun who is not a member of the British Army, RUC or UDR. (The latter are, of course, "workers in uniform".) In practice though, the main thrust of Militant's polemics are directed towards the Republicans, though it often does not make any distinction between them and Loyalists.

An article in the "Irish Militant" of February, 1976, summed up Militant's traditional approach: "As for the paramilitary groups themselves, each one has adorned itself with the title of 'the defender of its respective area'. Responsible to no-one but themselves, elected by a ballot of bullets and guns, they have assumed the right to speak in the name of one section or other of our community. They have no such right. Far from providing a defence, it is in their positive interest to keep the situation at boiling point ... those sectarian bigots on either side have their sights set on a sectarian civil war." (27)

What was needed was "a bold policy (which) would cut the ground from under the bigots on both sides of the sectarian divide." (28) The establishment of the Better Life for All Campaign was regarded by Militant as the first step towards the adop-





tion of this bold policy, demonstrating that "no longer will the vile deeds of the bigots be tolerated" (29). Twelve months later, in 1977, "Irish Militant" proudly announced that "sectarianism has been put on the run" (30), whilst speakers at that year's Labour Party Young Socialists national conference denounced the Provisionals as "Mafioso gangsters with their fingers in the till" and demanded "smash the sectarian killers once and for all!" By 1979, speakers at that year's LPYS conference/summer school were claiming that there were "only twelve safe houses left for the Provisionals in the whole of Belfast" and the "Irish Militant" pointed to the campaign for political status by the prisoners in the H Blocks and Armagh as evidence of the lack of support for them: "Other forms of repression ... have most often evoked a sympathetic response from (labour movement) activists. Very largely, H Block has not. Primarily, this is due to the association of the struggle of the prisoners with the Provisional IRA. ... Their association with the para-military organisations denied them access to mass support outside the prisons." (31)

More recently, Militant has had to change tack in its tirades against the Provisionals (the Loyalists generally receive only a passing mention). To argue now, as Militant did in 1971, that "the Provisional leadership has shown itself incapable of consolidating any political movement" (32) would have a hollow ring in the aftermath of the various electoral victories of Sinn Fein, just as the mass support exhibited for the Provisional/INLA prisoners in 1981 undermines the "Irish Militant's" claims of 1979. Militant continues to refer to the "methods and policies of terrorism pursued by the Provisional IRA" (33) whom it describes as "a small group taking up the use of the bomb and the bullet" (34), whilst Gerry Adams' victory in the General Election is dealt with by arguing that Sinn Fein "appeared (emphasis added - note that word: 'appeared') anti-establishment, anti-Thatcher and anti-repression. On this basis, and above all because of the absence of any class alternative, it was partially able to tap the anti-Tory mood of workers and youth." (35) But, warned Militant, "no matter what their successes in this or future elections, Sinn Fein represents a dead end for workers and youth." (36)

Such is Militant's hostility towards the Provisionals that, when resolutions have been moved at Labour Party branches advocating a dialogue with Sinn Fein, Militant supporters have taken the lead in arguing against them. And when GLC Leader Ken Livingstone had the temerity to visit members of Sinn Fein in March, 1983, the "Irish Militant" could not contain its anger: "Ken Livingstone's visit made more difficult the building of a mass Labour Party in Northern Ireland. He associated the Left of the Labour Party with a sectarian based organisation in the North. By doing so, he lessened the attraction of a Labour Party in many workers' eyes. It was clear that his knowledge of Ireland is minimal. ... It is unforgiveable that any Labour leader would visit the North of Ireland and not go through the official organisations of the working class, the trade unions and the trades councils. Livingstone has damaged the working class movement in the North by his failure to fight on his own Party's policies on Northern Ireland. These are for the building of a trade union-based labour party and for the uniting of the working class." (37)

Militant's hostility to the Provisionals and the Republican movement as a whole is rooted in its inability to explain their existence. Given the inbuilt sectarianism of the Six Counties statelet, periodic spontaneous revolt by the minority facing the discrimination is inevitable; the statelet responds by physical repression; and so those facing the repression throw up their own militia to fight back against that repression and the attacks of the Loyalist assassins directed at cowing them



into submission. In other words, the nature of Northern Ireland leads to the creation of organisations such as the Provisional IRA on the one hand, and the Ulster Volunteer Force on the other, whilst the different goals of such organisations is likewise dictated by Northern Ireland's inherently sectarian nature.

But the scenario which Militant has created for Northern Irish politics precludes any such understanding. If "class unity" is predicated as the normal state of affairs and the existence of sectarianism and discriminatory privileges denied, as is the case with Militant, then there is no room left to explain the origins of the Provisionals or the Loyalist paramilitaries. Thus, they can only be seen as a threat to "class unity", given that any other explanation and characterisation of them would stand in contradiction to the rest of Militant's politics on Northern Ireland.

Militant has similar difficulties when it comes to the question of the Army. "It would be fatal to think," warned Militant in 1969, "that the troops were sent solely (emphasis added) to defend the Catholic population from attack by the Paisleyites and B Specials. The calculation of the ruling class again was fear of the political upheavals, destruction of property and 'dangerous' political vacuums which would have been created if Civil War had followed." (38) Such a line of argument amounted to a denial of the Army's specific task of beating down the Catholic revolt, by counterposing to this the general role of any capitalist Army of defending capitalist relations. A specific example will clarify what is meant by this.

In 1971 internment was introduced into the Six Counties, again. It was clearly an attempt to break the re-emerging Republican movement. Militant denied this. Instead, it argued that it was a general attack on the ruling classes' opponents: "Internment is not a religious but a class issue. The criterion by which internees are arrested is not their religion but the extent to which they threaten the ruling class. ... Even today it is clearly not the IRA who have been the main target. Instead it has largely been members of the left wing opposition to the regime." (39) In other words, there was no specific conflict, in the eyes of Militant, between the Catholic population/Republican movement and the Army; there was merely the general conflict between the armed defenders of the capitalist order and the "strength of a united working class".

And Militant extends its approach to internment to the whole question of repression: "Repression is not a Republican issue; it effects the whole of the working class" (40). This too is the logical outcome of Militant's scenario politics: repression could be directed predominantly at one section of the working class only if there were divisions in that working class. To accept this would mean junking the idea of a "splendid tradition of common struggle".

Militant claims to stand for the withdrawal of the troops. On an abstract level, it does. But not in the here and now: "The LPYS have stood since 1969 for the withdrawal of the troops. But this has not been put forward in an irresponsible way without regard to the overall situation in the North." (41) What this means is that Militant couples the call for the withdrawal of the troops with the demand for a trade union-based defence force. Either this means no withdrawal of the troops until the creation of such a force, in which case withdrawal is postponed indefinitely and the Army is implicitly seen as a substitute for such a force, or withdrawal of the troops is not dependent on the creation of this force, in which case Militant's twin-demand becomes a convoluted call for immediate withdrawal, which TWF condemns as an "irresponsible" demand for failing to take into account "the overall situation in the North".

Moreover, Militant links up the questions of troop withdrawal and a trade union defence force because of the need for "a vigorous policy by the labour movement to achieve working class unity" (42), for "the question of Northern Ireland will be finally resolved .... when a united working class emerges from the struggle for a better life." (43) Militant thereby ends up performing a complete somersault. Militant consistently argues that the working class is, and always has been, united. But as soon as the question of British withdrawal is raised, Militant denies this, by seeing class unity as something requiring a "vigorous policy" to be achieved and something emerging in the future from "the struggle for a better life". Thus, Militant's entire politics on Northern Ireland are based on a notion (united working class) which Militant itself rejects when confronted with the demand for British withdrawal. This is not serious politics.



# FOOTNOTES

## LABOUR PARTY POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND

1. "Northern Ireland - Statement by the National Executive Committee to the 1981 Conference", p.1; 2. *ibid*, p.5; 3. *ibid*, p.5; 4. "Troublesome Business", Geoffrey Bell, p.6; 5. *ibid*, p.33; 6. *ibid*, p.33; 7. *ibid*, p.38; 8. *ibid*, p.54; 9. *ibid*, p.62; 10. *ibid*, p.62; 11. *ibid*, p.63; 12. quoted in "Northern Ireland - The Orange State", Michael Farrell, p.188; 13. quoted in "Ireland Socialist Review", no.1, p.10; 14. for transcript of debate at 1979 conference, see "Ireland Socialist Review", no.6; 15. quoted in Bell, *op. cit.* p.125; 16. NEC Statement, *op. cit.* p.1; 17. *ibid*, p.3; 18. *ibid*, pp.3/4; 19. *ibid*, pp.4/5; 20. *ibid*, p.5; 21. *ibid*, p.5; 22. *ibid*, p.9; 23. "Rights", November, 1980, p.3; 24. NEC Statement, *op. cit.* p.9; 25. *ibid*, p.8; 26. *ibid*, p.8; 27. *ibid*, p.9; 28. *ibid*, p.8; 29. *ibid*, p.7; 30. *ibid*, p.7; 31. *ibid*, p.7; 32. *ibid*, p.7; 33. *ibid*, p.7; 34. *ibid*, pp.12/13; 35. *ibid*, pp.13/14; 36. *ibid*, p.12; 37. *ibid*, p.14; 38. *ibid*, p.14; 39. *ibid*, p.12; 40. *ibid*, p.12; 41. "Northern Ireland - Between Civil Rights and Civil War", L. O'Dowd/B. Rolston/M. Tomlinson, p.179; 42. NEC Statement, *op. cit.* p.15; 43. *ibid*, p.14; 44. *ibid*, p.14; 45. *ibid*, p.15; 46. "The Use and Abuse of Emergency Legislation in Northern Ireland", Dermot Walsh, p.103; 47. *ibid*, p.94; 48. NEC Statement, *op. cit.* p.18; 49. *ibid*, p.20; 50. *ibid*, p.21; 51. *ibid*, p.16; 52. "Belfast Bulletin", no.9, p.25; 53. Walsh, *op. cit.* p.121; 54. NEC Statement, *op. cit.* p.23; 55. "The Trade Union Alternative", Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, p.1; 56. O'Dowd et al, *op. cit.* p.59; 57. for further commentary on the NEC Statement's economic strategy, see "Which Way to Withdrawal", Don Flynn; 58. NEC Statement, *op. cit.* p.25.

## *Join the Labour Committee on Ireland!*

This pamphlet has been produced by the Glasgow branch of the Labour Committee on Ireland (LCI). Two subsequent pamphlets will cover: Labour Party organisation and Northern Ireland, Northern Irish trade unionism; and discrimination, Republicanism and Loyalism. None of the views expressed necessarily represent the views of the LCI as a whole.

The LCI was set up in March 1980 at a founding conference attended by some 150 Labour Party members including 44 CLP delegates. A branch of the LCI was set up in Glasgow in the summer of the same year. The LCI campaigns for an end to the Party's bipartisan approach with the Tories to Ireland, and for the labour movement to instead adopt a policy of British withdrawal.

For further information about/to join the LCI, write to: Glasgow LCI, C/O. Box 9, 488 Great Western Road, Glasgow.

## 'MILITANT' AND NORTHERN IRELAND

1. "Northern Ireland - The Way Forward" (TWF), LPYS Policy Document, p.8; 2. quoted in Bell, *cit. sup.* p.17; 3. quoted in "Ireland Socialist Review", no.2, p.16; 4. TWF, *op. cit.* p.8; 5. *ibid*, p.9; 6. *ibid*, p.9; 7. "Militant", 17/9/76; 8. TWF, *op. cit.* p.9; 9. *ibid*, p.9; 10. "Militant", September, 1969; 11. TWF, *op. cit.* p.8; 12. "Militant", 1/6/83; 13. TWF, *op. cit.* p.4; 14. "Militant", September, 1969; 15. *ibid*; 16. "Militant", 3/9/71; 17. TWF, *op. cit.* p.14; 18. "Militant", 24/5/74; 19. "Militant", 4/2/72; 20. "Militant", 24/5/74; 21. *ibid*; 22. "Militant", September, 1969; 23. *ibid*; 24. "Militant", 3/9/71; 25. TWF, *op. cit.* p.13; 26. *ibid*, p.13; 27. "Irish Militant", February, 1976; 28. "Militant", 4/2/72; 29. "Irish Militant", February, 1976; 30. "Irish Militant", June, 1977; 31. "Irish Militant", May, 1972; 32. "Militant", 3/9/71; 33. TWF, *op. cit.* p.6; 34. *ibid*, p.6; 35. "Militant", 24/6/83; 36. *ibid*; 37. "Irish Militant", April, 1983; 38. "Militant", September, 1969; 39. "Militant", 3/9/71; 40. "Militant", 4/2/83; 41. TWF, *op. cit.* p.18; 42. *ibid*, p.18; 43. *ibid*, p.16.