REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST TENDENCY

IRELAND: IT'S A WAR, NOT A QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

DEMONSTRATION IN SUPPORT OF POLITICAL STATUS

FOR REPUBLICAN PRISONERS

Sunday 9 July 1978 2.30pm Speaker's Corner, Hyde Park

The British left - not to mention the Church of England - has been struck with a sudden concern over Ireland. Amnesty International's long-awaited report on police interrogation techniques in the Six Counties should have surprised no-one. It merely related a few of the brutal methods that the British state must employ in fighting the Irish war. The left however was quite overcome. Socialist Challenge called it 'a truly damning document' (15 June 1978); Socialist Worker wrote of 'shattering new evidence of torture' (17 June 1978); even the pro-imperialist Communist Party of Great Britain was moved to take up the issue: the Morning Star demanded 'a public and impartial inquiry with the full powers required to expose the whole truth of torture in Northern Ireland' (14 June 1978).

In a similar spirit many left organisations are now backing the 9 July demonstration in support of political status. The fact that the republican prisoners concerned are prisoners of war is one which is unfortunately absent from much of the publicity for the demonstration. The left is anxious to make it known that innocent people may have been imprisoned as a consequence of forced confessions, and that the government appears to have forgotten the traditions of British justice and fair play. But what effect will these 'facts' have? Can they really lead to the building of an effective movement in solidarity with the national liberation struggle in Ireland?

In the crisis the bourgeoisie has proven very capable of drawing all classes in British society behind it, leaving the working class disarmed against attacks on its living standards. Labour movement support for wage restraint, nationalisation, planning agreements and import controls all express this identification with its 'own' nation state. However radical certain British solutions to the crisis may sound, they do not advance an independent class position which can defend the working class. So too with the question of Ireland. The Six Counties is accepted as an integral part of the United Kingdom. The British state therefore appears to have a legitimate right to impose 'law and order' there, even if the methods employed are occasionally considered a little excessive. This is all that the recent extended coverage of torture in the left press represents - a concentration on the more brutal aspects of British rule and an inability of the bourgeoisie to keep the lid on the war.

The bourgeois characterisation of the war as the activity of 'criminals' is not opposed in the labour movement. Instead its organised voice calls on the British state to introduce democracy and a Bill of Rights as the way of bringing about peace. This notion - that the British state can implement a 'democratic' solution to the Irish war - must be destroyed if revolutionaries are to begin to build an anti-imperialist movement in Britain. The British state's solution to the Irish war demands an all-out attack on the national liberation movement: the withdrawal of political status in 1976 and the 'criminalisation' of Irish prisoners of war are aspects of this campaign.

Why must the working class in Britain support the Irish people's struggle and demand political status for republicans? Is it simply because the techniques of repression used against Irish workers today will be used against British workers tomorrow? Such an argument is totally insufficient. The real danger is that the absence of opposition to the oppressive role of the British state in Ireland consolidates the political weakness of the British working class. By leaving the 'national interest' unchallenged, it leaves the labour movement defenceless against bourgeois attacks today.

Support for the demand for political status cannot mean support for abstract justice; it cannot mean a display of humanitarian sentiment. Gestures such as one-off demonstrations do not represent real working class solidarity with the struggle for national liberation in Ireland. The prisoners 'on the blanket' in Irish jails are the enemies of British imperialism. In order to build genuine support for the political status campaign, revolutionaries must bring home to the labour movement that the war in Ireland against British imperialism advances the independent interests of the British working class.

Support for the campaign therefore means open confrontation between the ruling and working classes in Britain. Such a blow to class collaboration and the dominance of ruling class ideas is in the interests of the working class in both Ireland and Britain. The recognition of the independent class interests of British workers is a precondition both for the social emancipation of the working class in Britain and for building a movement which can give genuine solidarity to the Irish struggle. This is the revolutionary significance of the demand for political status for republican prisoners - a demand which follows directly from that of self-determination for the Irish people.

The British bourgeoisie does not deny Amnesty's charges of brutality: it justifies them as a necessary part of the campaign against the 'men of violence' - the IRA. The Daily Telegraph was not worried by the findings:

> 'Amnesty fails altogether to come to grips with the truth that interrogation is in its nature a harsh and unpleasant exercise and that the borderline between legitimate pressure and bullying is not easily drawn. It also fails to recognise that

> the State, while not condoning brutality, must have regard to public safety as well as to the rights of suspected terrorists' (15 June 1978).

Interrogation may be a nasty business: but when 'public safety' - that euphamism for the survival of British imperialism and its state - is threatened, what other methods can be employed?

Without the political arguments to oppose Britain's occupation and administration of the Six Counties, the labour movement remains powerless to oppose the consequences of this - a necessarily brutal and repressive war against the nationalist population. When the British left refuses to confront reformism over the question of Ireland it does no more than express sympathy for the Irish. Unless work is directed towards laying the basis for an anti-imperialist movement in Britain, all the fine words about 'solidarity' become empty. Inability to recognise the importance of the political domination of Ireland by the British state is ingrained on the left. Following the recent murder of Brian Maguire in a Castlereagh cell, Socialist Worker reported the death as if it had happened in Birmingham: its headline was 'Belfast police kill trade unionist'. The left fails to appreciate that the fight for an anti-imperialist position on Ireland is central to combatting the chauvinism of the British labour movement and creating a vanguard trained in the spirit of internationalism.

The radical moralism of those organisations who do formally recognise the demand for self-determination is little better. By themselves, exposures of interrogation techniques, forced confessions and facts about the prison conditions of republicans do nothing to break the labour movement from allegiance to its 'own' state. Such facts can only be interpreted from a class point of view - from the side of those struggling for self-determination or from the side of British imperialism. Good intentions are not sufficient to build solidarity. Effective solidarity must entail breaking sections of the working class politically from reformism in order to lay the basis for an anti-imperialist movement.

This is the task to which revolutionary communists must turn. It involves explaining the nature of events in Ireland as a war between the Irish people and British imperialism. It means showing that men and women are held in Long Kesh and Armagh prisons because they are the enemies of the British state - not because of an infraction of human rights which can be rectified by a public enquiry or an international tribunal. It means demonstrating that the British state must continue to operate in a ruthless and brutal way if the interests of capital are to be safeguarded. In this way the British working class will begin to understand the nature of ruling class domination and recognise its common interests with the struggle of the Irish people.

We therefore urge support for the demonstration called by the Prisoners' Aid Committee and its demand for political status for republican prisoners on Sunday 9 July 1978 at 2.30pm, Speaker's Corner.

SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE — TROOPS OUT NOW

POLITICAL STATUS FOR IRISH PRISONERS OF WAR

FREE ALL ANTI-IMPERIALIST IRISH PRISONERS

Revolutionary Communist Papers No 2, published by the Revolutionary Communist Tendency, contains a Marxist analysis of the Irish crisis today and a polemic against the International Tribunal on Britain's presence in Ireland, which it exposes as an opportunistic manoeuvre supported by many organisations on the radical left.

Revolutionary Communist Papers No 3 examines the unfolding of the crisis in Britain during the past decade. It analyses reformism and explains why the working class has accepted the Social Contract. This assessment of recent struggles of the working class contains important lessons for the movement.

Each Journal costs 50p plus 15p postage. Cheques and postal orders payable to RCT Association.

We will be holding a dayschool on 5 August 1978 to discuss the ideas contained in these two Journals. In addition we are planning a series of forums in the autumn and winter to develop further the analysis in Revolutionary Communist Papers No 2 and draw out the revolutionary significance of Ireland for the British working class. If you wish to purchase any of our propaganda or attend these meetings, write to us at BM RCT, London WC1V 6XX.

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