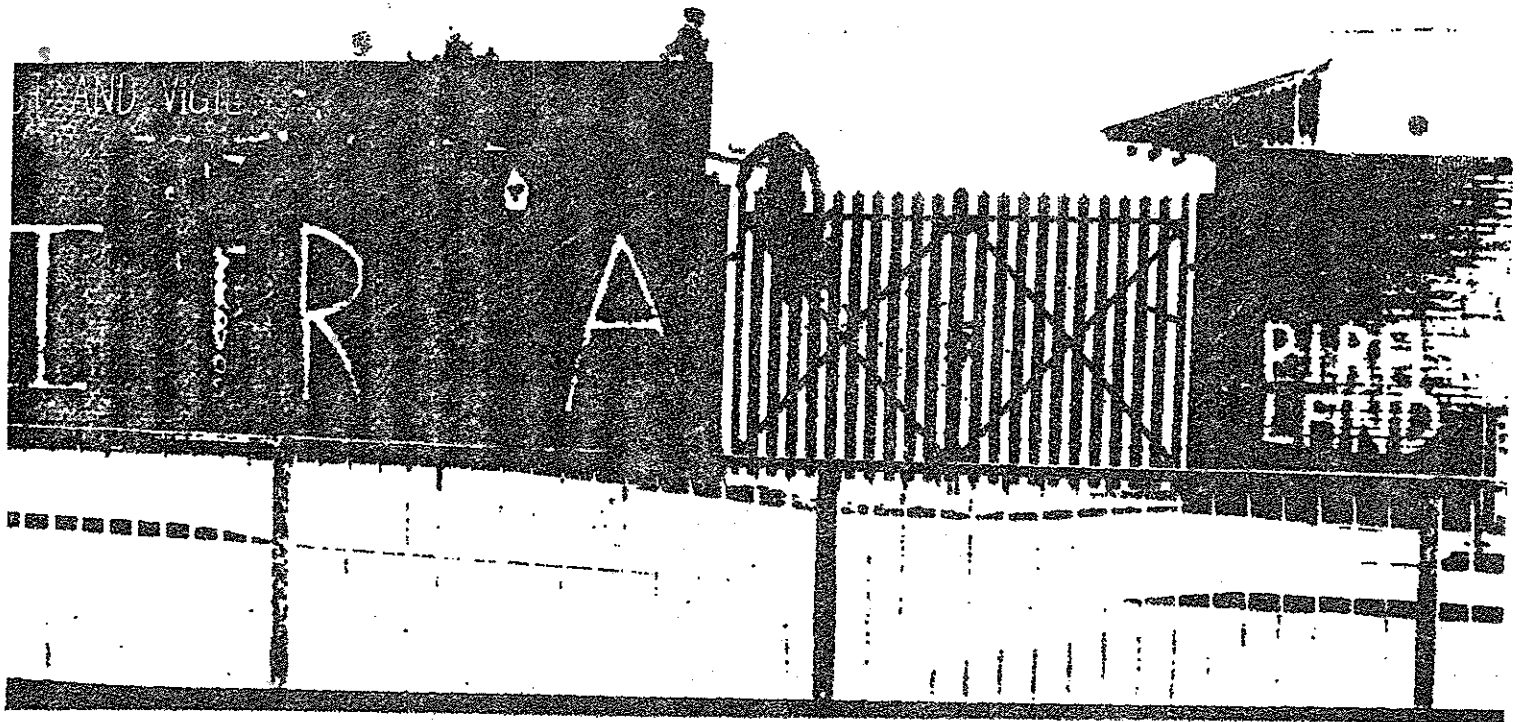


SHEFFIELD I.F.M. BULLETIN

Nº1

10p



Victory To The Irish People

'Open Letter to the British Workers'

'British workers, the responsibility for what is happening in Ireland, and for the terrible possibilities with which the situation is pregnant, is yours. It is your Government and your army. I say your army advisedly. They are your soldiers, recruited from your class, your sons and brothers, bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh. Their arms and munitions are manufactured by you, you transport them to Ireland, and only with your aid and cooperation are they enabled to keep their heels on our necks...'

from Eadmon Macalpine printed in no 26 of the Sheffield Worker

VICTORY TO THE IRISH PEOPLE

On the front page of this first bulletin of the Sheffield IFM we set out our stall. In 1920 when the letter we quote was written it resounded throughout the British labour movement. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the official leadership of our movement in the TUC and the Labour Party were able to hold in check the solidarity that rank and file workers expressed with the Irish forces fighting for national self-determination.

Within a year Ireland was partitioned. The presentation of partition as a progressive solution by the Labour party gave a cloak of respectability to the solution which British imperialism had devised to enable its continued domination of Ireland as a whole.

Sixty years later we in the IFM can claim no success comparable to the following motion sent by the Miner's Federation to the TUC and passed by 2 760 000 votes to 1 636 000.

'... protested against the British military domination of Ireland and demanded the withdrawal of all British troops from that country, the cessation of the production of munitions of war destined to be used against Ireland and Russia, and in case the Government refuses these demands we recommend a general 'down tools' policy.'

The aim of the IFM is to win such a vote and to ensure it is acted on. To do so we have to throw off the present leadership of our movement and dispel the illusion that Britain has any progressive role to play in Ireland. We believe that the British working class has a natural ally in the Irish people who are fighting against the state which is our common enemy. We also believe that the power of the working class thrown into the struggle on the side of the forces fighting for national liberation will be decisive in bringing about the defeat of British imperialism.

This bulletin will report the activities of the local IFM group. On the streets and in the labour movement we will be arguing for anti-imperialist politics. If you want to see the defeat of the British state get in contact with us.

YOUTH DELEGATION GOES TO DERRY

In March this year the Irish Freedom Movement (IFM) organised a youth delegation to Northern Ireland (the six counties). We went to support the annual commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising. A hundred of us from all over Britain went over for three days to see for ourselves what was happening.

Before the trip I was ambiguous in my attitude to the IRA. While not condemning them, like the British gutter press, as a bunch of psychopaths, because it is obvious to me that there is a war on, I was unsure just what support they had in the community. Obviously they had some support as it would be impossible to fight a war for 13 years without it!.

Welcomed by Brits

We travelled by coach to Stranraer and then by ferry to Larne. In Larne we had a taste of conditions in the North. We were held up for more than an hour for luggage and body searches. With that behind us we split into two groups and I went to Derry. The road from Larne to Derry is a peaceful country one, but the peace was broken by an army patrol.

Troops armed with sub-machine guns surrounded the coach, others covered the fields from the hedgerows guarding against ambush. Nothing I could say can describe the shock of being, for the first time, at the other end of a gun. We were taken from the coach in groups of two: asked our names, destination and reason for travel. This incident a great shock for delegates is the daily diet of the nationalist people, and a mild version at that.

You are now entering Free Derry

We were welcomed by members of Sinn Féin and Youth against the H Blocks who were our guides. From the Bogside we looked up the hill where on the old city wall the Brits looked down over the ghetto. Behind it lay the loyalist areas secure in the benefits guaranteed to them by Britain. The Brits utilize reminders of oppression which they hope will keep the 'taigs' in their place. But the nationalists won't lie down. Republican volunteers had blasted the statue of an ex-governor of the province who had pointed a finger over the Bogside. No mean feat with the army barracks only 50 yards from the spot where it had stood.

The whole of the republican area was decorated with murals and stirring slogans. The green white and orange tricolour flew from the lampposts, flats and houses; kerbstones were painted the same colours.

As we walked through the streets we would often be accompanied by an RUC jeep or pig. And before long youths would appear from all sides of the street, to pelt it with stones. An elderly woman shouted from the Rosville flats that she would be coming past and not to hit her and the direction the pig had taken (since our visit the republican movement has requested the youth to hold back from random attacks on the British and RUC forces because of the hazards sometimes caused to residents of the area).

Easter Day.

From the Bogside to the cemetery the people of Derry make their way to remember the Rising, their own dead. They are led by an IRA colour party in uniform and masks, openly flying the flag of the republic and applauded through the streets. Every house was empty. And all the time overhead hovered the army helicopters.

After the march and the speeches the crowd gathered round the colour party and within moments the soldiers became ordinary members of the nationalist community. Protected by the community from the watching eyes in the helicopters. There could be no clearer example that the IRA were not isolated from the community. All the crowd knew their identities and none would reveal it.

Judith

WE ONLY WANT THE EARTH

Some men, faint-hearted, ever seek.
Our programme to retouch,
And will insist, whene'er they speak
That we demand too much.
'Tis passing strange, yet I declare
Such statements give me mirth,
For our demands most moderate are,
We only want the earth.

'Ee moderate, 'the trimmers cry,
Who dread the tyrant's thunder.
'You ask too much and people fly
From you aghast in wonder.'
'Tis passing strange, for I declare
Such statements give me mirth,
For our demands most moderate are,
We only want the earth.

Our masters all a godly crew,
Whose hearts throb for the poor,
Their sympathies assure us, too,
If our demands were fewer.
Most generous souls! But please observe,
What they enjoy from birth
Is all we ever had the nerve
To ask, that is, the earth.

The 'labour fakir' full of guile,
Base doctrine ever preaches,
And whilst he bleeds the rank and file
Tame moderation teaches.
Yet, in despite, we'll see the day
When, with sword in its girth,
Labour shall march in war array
To realise its own, the earth.

For labour long, with sighs and tears,
 To its oppressors knelt.
 But never yet, to aught save fears,
 Did the heart of tyrant melt.
 We need not kneel, our cause no dearth
 Of loyal soldiers' needs
 And our victorious rallying cry
 Shall be we want the earth!

James Connolly, Songs of Freedom, 1907

YOUTH DELEGATION IN BELFAST

During the Easter weekend of this year one hundred youth, including myself, visited either Belfast or Derry to commemorate the 1916 rebellion; and to see for ourselves the reality of British rule in the six counties.

The visit was arranged by the IFM and delegates were sponsored by trade union branches and other labour movement bodies with the aim that delegates should report back to the membership.

The RUC puts out the welcome mat

As soon as our ferry landed in Ireland the RUC and special branch welcomed us with thorough body and baggage searches and the confiscation of posters and pamphlets. Unlike their counterparts in Britain the security forces in the six counties need make no secret of their ability or willingness to act in anyway they see fit. The brief of the Emergency Powers Act covers all their actions.

I was part of the Belfast contingent. We arrived in Belfast city centre on a busy saturday morning. The traffic was punctuated by huge armoured trucks of the British army, the soldiers inside pointing their high velocity rifles in your face as they cruised by. Army foot patrols manoeuvre through the shoppers checking and rechecking. They concentrate on the nationalist areas so that the ordinary necessities of life become an ordeal for the people.

Andy town

We stayed in the nationalist area known as Andersonstown, in a community centre. Almost immediately we were taken on a tour of the area. Nearly every wall was covered with graffitti pledging support for the republican movement, solidarity with the hunger strikers and demanding 'Brits Out!'

In talking to the people we met on the streets and particularly the youth we became aware of the close-knit nature of the community and the high degree of politicisation. Everyone had their own story to tell of British oppression or violence at the hands of the RUC or loyalist

paramilitaries. Parents, brothers, sisters were either victims of sectarian attacks and killings or they were political prisoners in Long Kesh and Armagh. Yet what struck us most was the eagerness of the youth to know what was happening in Britain. Far from making them insular their experience had sharpened their political curiosity.

The Parade

On the Sunday thousands marched behind the colour party of the Provisional IRA, way up the crowd lined Falls to Milltown cemetery to honour the republican dead. Even here in Belfast where the nationalists are in a minority so solid is the support that the security forces cannot touch the colour party.

The three days I spent in Belfast was important to me. It made me determined to come back and explain exactly what is going on in Belfast. That the republican movement does have the support of the nationalist population. That the British army is an army of occupation directed against one section of the community and that I would be prepared to argue that here in Britain we should struggle to win unconditional support for the war against the British state. There is no other way.

VICTORY TO THE IRISH PEOPLE. Chris

THE IFM AND THE UNIONS

In the last month we have spoken on Ireland in four trade union meetings. We've done this by keeping our eyes open, by talking frankly about our politics on Ireland and by following up any openings.

The fact that we can suggest that delegates from the Easter visit will be able to speak or that we can offer the new video No British Solution is a definite advantage. It is much more direct and provides a better focus for discussion. It is a great experience for delegates to speak in such meetings. They can test their experiences and arguments against both the convictions and prejudices of trade unionists.

One problem we cannot solve in the short term is that some of the meetings we have attended notably UCATT and AUEW branches have been badly attended. Members see little point in turning up when their experience is that the meetings are designed for the bureaucracy rather than the rank and file. This makes it even more imperative to reach trade unionists at every opportunity in order to rebuild the unions around open political discussion and politics which take up the present leadership on every question.

Whenever we go to trade union branches, whatever the political complexion of the branch we go to argue our politics straight. For example at the UCATT branch meeting the delegate outlined what had happened over Easter and I came in to emphasise why support for the Irish liberation struggle is central to the emancipation of the working

class here in Britain.

Even in small meetings a whole range of opinions comes up - the soldiers are doing what is necessary; it's a war between religious maniacs; and support for Irish self-determination. We are often just the catalyst for real political debate between the members.

Invariably the time allotted is insufficient and we must make sure that we can continue the discussion afterwards. We will answer seriously any question seriously put. Speaking at union branches is not an end in itself, it is merely a sounding board. We want to continue the discussion with individuals and in other forums in the labour movement. And to draw workers into anti-imperialist work.

Just to conclude. As a result of this single UCATT meeting we received another invitation and were offered another couple of suggestions to try.

Grant.

NO BRITISH SOLUTION is a video that takes up the arguments that you hear on the streets of Britain and answers them with the words and actions of the Irish people. If you want to know what life in Belfast and Derry is like come and see NO BRITISH SOLUTION (20p on the door) and discuss how we can make the most of it to build anti-imperialist politics in Britain today.

NO BRITISH SOLUTION
SHEFFIELD CENTRE AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT (SCAU)
BRIDGE STREET
WEDNESDAY 14 JULY 7.30pm

If you want to show NO BRITISH SOLUTION at your branch, community group, tenant's association or whatever; or want to find out more about the IFM contact BM RCP London WC1N 3XX Tel 01 274 3951

p&p BCM JPLTD London WC1N 3XX

