

SMASH THE

PREVENTION

OF

TERRORISM

ACT!

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST TENDENCY

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- 24 April Five Irish workers from Derry are detained by Liverpool police on their way to get jobs at the Ford Motor Company in Slough. Held for three days under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), all five are released after police warned Ford that these workers might be 'terrorists'. They returned to Ireland without jobs.
- 2 May In retaliation for the killing of Airey Neave, Tory spokesman on Northern Ireland, the Special Branch arrest and beat up Peter Grimes, former organiser of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) in England. The Special Branch has had a long training for this kind of activity. It was established in the nineteenth century to terrorise the Fenians who were at that time leading the struggle against Britain's oppression of Ireland.
- 3 May Two Labour Party (LP) canvassers are picked up outside the house of a prominent United Troops Out Movement (UTOM) member. They are also bundled off under the PTA. Like a shop steward from Vauxhall's Luton plant who was detained during the general election campaign, their opposition to Britain's role in Ireland was enough to throw the British state's security forces into a panic.

These are only a few examples of how the PTA was used by the Labour Government in the days preceding the 1979 General Election. Since then the new Tory Government has continued the repression of the Irish and of supporters of the Irish liberation struggle. Further arrests have been made and Jimmy Scanlon, a member of the IRSP London support group, was recently served with a deportation order. Such harassment is nothing new. Even at the height of post-war stability the British state never once loosened its grip on the people of the Six Counties. While on some issues the two major parties may have their differences, as far as Ireland is concerned they are at one: 'If they don't crawl send in more troops! If they speak out in Britain - arrest them under the PTA!'



Ever since Ireland was divided by British imperialism in 1921 some form of 'emergency power' has been directed at the people of the Six Counties. When the Irish people once again took up the struggle for national liberation in the late 'sixties special legislation was supplemented by military occupation. The Partition of Ireland can only be maintained by force of arms. Any challenge to the division of Ireland represents a direct threat to British imperialism. That is why all British governments - be they Tory or Labour - have no choice but to resort to systematic repression.

Ten years ago a Labour government sent British troops into the Six Counties; five years ago a Labour government introduced the PTA. In both instances, this so-called 'party of working people' rushed to the defence of the interests of British imperialism in Ireland. The Labour Party has served the capitalist class well by obscuring the root cause of the Irish War - the imperialist oppression of Ireland. When the troops were first sent to Ireland, the Government said they were there for 'peace-keeping purposes', to keep 'two feuding communities' apart. Today the official version is different. Bourgeois propaganda calls for the 'murderers' and 'terrorists' to be isolated from the community and brought to justice: the 'peace-keeping' forces are there to defend the community from these 'madmen'.

In reality the 'terrorists' are the protectors of the Catholic working class ghettos. That is why the imperialists want to isolate them. This is why the imperialists portray the artificial six county state as normal and the 'terrorists' as abnormal and criminal. For the imperialists to do otherwise would be to admit that the 'terrorist' is in fact a soldier in an army fighting a war. The Prevention of Terrorism Act is one weapon in the arsenal of British imperialism to fight the Irish War.

The British ruling class understands that a war is a war. This is the basis for its support of the PTA. Workers who want to defend their class interests must oppose the PTA, not as a particularly objectionable piece of legislation, but as an aspect of the war waged against the Irish. Effective opposition to the PTA must be based on winning support for the enemies of British capitalism - the Irish national liberation movement. Legalistic opposition to the undemocratic character of the PTA obscures the issues at stake. Even well-meaning opponents of the PTA fall into this trap: 'Merseyside UTOM has published a short guide to the act, demanding that this most repressive piece of

legislation passed in modern Britain outside wartime be scrapped' (Troops Out, Vol 2, No 2, November 1978, p8). Merseyside UTOM has missed the point - the PTA was passed during 'wartime' precisely to consolidate British imperialism's repression of the Irish liberation struggle. Opposition to the PTA cannot be reduced to a quibble about civil rights. This legislation did not come out of the blue - it is specifically designed to attack the Irish community in Britain as well as sympathisers of the liberation struggle. Through harassment and victimisation British imperialism hopes to isolate opposition to the war. Those who accept the right of the British state to dominate Ireland will not object to the legal repression of the Irish in Britain. Workers will only struggle against the PTA if they see that it is in their class interests to defend the Irish liberation movement. That is why opponents of the PTA in the British working class must win support for Irish self-determination.

THE AIM OF THE PTA

The bombing of two Birmingham pubs on 21 November 1974 provided the excuse to introduce the PTA. Eight days later Parliament rushed through this legislation in record time. The PTA had been in preparation for 18 months before it was brought to Parliament. It is based on the Prevention of Violence Act (PVA) of 1939, which was used against the Irish community 40 years ago. Whereas the PVA established a register of all Irish residents in Britain, the PTA banned the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Apart from this one main difference between the two Acts, the rest of the provisions are similar. The PTA legitimises the following measures to defend the interests of the British state:

- * it makes possible the exclusion from Britain of persons involved in 'terrorism'
- * it allows police to detain suspects for up to seven days without charge
- * it makes it an offence to contribute to or receive money in connection with acts of 'terrorism', or to withhold information about them.

'Terrorism' is the name given to all anti-imperialist acts - the PTA enables the state to persecute all its opponents legally.

When the PTA was introduced in the House of Commons, it was presented as a temporary measure, likely to last for only six months. It has now been in existence



for five years, and will continue to exist as long as the Irish War lasts. When it was introduced no Labour MP spoke against the PTA. It was passed without a vote.

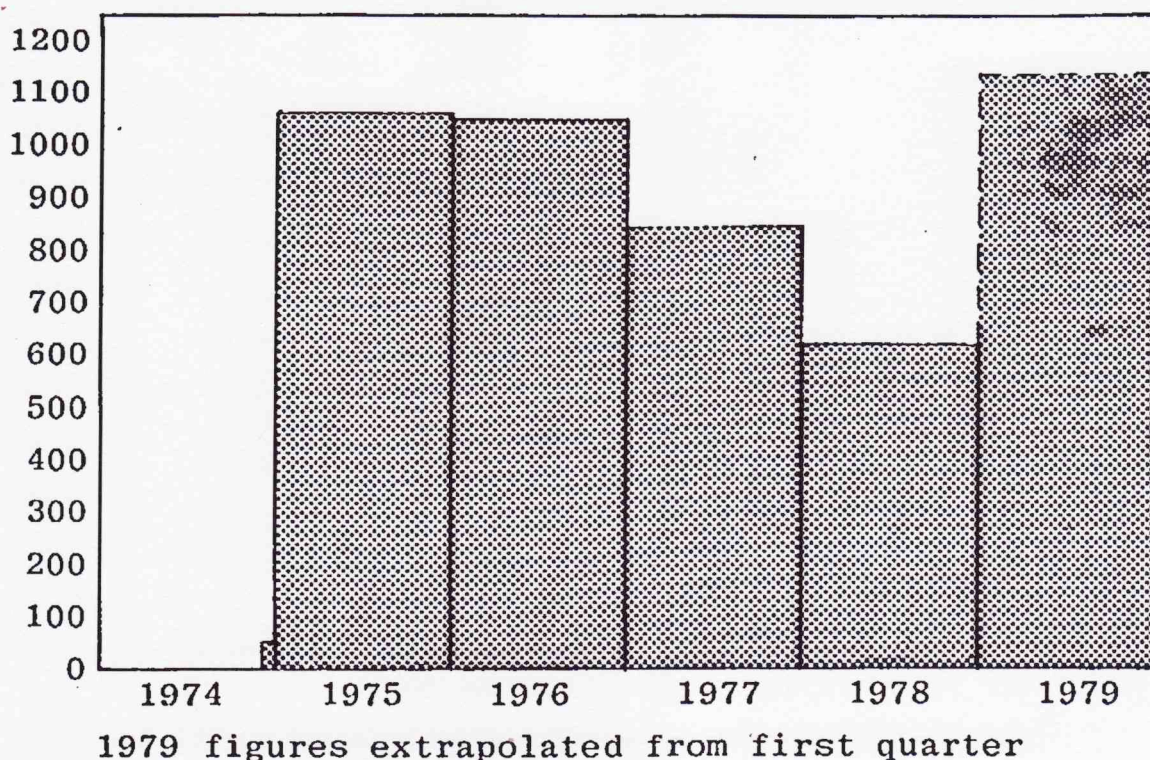
However, when the implementation of the PTA led to the systematic harassment of the Irish community, left-wing supporters of the British state began to have second thoughts. 'Was it working?' asked Ray Buckton (ASLEF), Alan Sapper (ACTT) and MPs Tom Litterick, Joan Maynard, Ian Mikardo and Jo Richardson. Far from opposing the war in Ireland, they felt that the PTA was giving Britain a bad name. These friends of democracy sought a more 'democratic' formula for crushing the 'terrorists'. The outcome was the Campaign Against the PTA (CAPTA), initiated by the National Council for Civil Liberties. This campaign had no doubts about which side it supported in the Irish War. It issued a model trade union resolution which stated: 'This.... (organisation) while it unreservedly condemns terrorism, regards the Prevention of Terrorism Act as a fundamental denial of human rights, which like repressive legislation anywhere is likely to increase rather than decrease support for terrorism...' (The 'Prevention of Terrorism' Act DOES NOT STOP TERRORISM, CAPTA leaflet, no date).

When the PTA came up for its annual renewal in March 1979 over 30 MPs forced themselves to vote against it. This opposition to the PTA did not represent a rejection of British imperialism. On the contrary, they felt that this messy business was superfluous in the fight against 'terrorism'. As a recent article in Tribune explained: 'In practically all cases where serious charges have been preferred under the Prevention of Terrorism Act the police already had sufficient evidence to arrest under their powers contained in Section Two of the Criminal Law Act 1967...' (Tribune, 9 March 1979).

While the British bourgeoisie has noted these criticisms it disagrees that the PTA is superfluous or ineffective in crushing support for 'terrorism'. It prefers to consult the Home Office Statistical Bulletin which provides results it can understand. In the five years of its operation, around 4000 people have been detained under the PTA in Britain - an average of 25 each week. Up to 70 per cent are detained at ports and airports - mostly on the way out of Britain. Most of the detentions occur in three places. Between November 1974 and March 1979, 964 people were picked up in Liverpool, 869 in London and 706 in Stranraer. The usual length of detention varies between one and four days.

Arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1974 and 1976. Britain, 29 November 1974 to 31 March 1979.

Source: Statistical Bulletin, Home Office, issue 3/79, 26 April 1979



Of those detained under the PTA, three per cent are excluded from Britain and seven per cent are charged with various offences such as: attempted murder, handling explosives or conspiracy to cause explosions. Often the charges have nothing to do with so-called 'terrorist' offences. The three per cent excluded are taken to Ireland - normally to the Six Counties.

Nine out of ten people detained under the Act are picked up to be harassed and interrogated for a couple of days and then released. What these figures fail to reveal is that for every victim of the PTA, thousands of others are continually under state pressure. Indeed the main aim of this vicious law is to silence the Irish community in Britain. Although the case histories of people detained for interrogation under the PTA show that they come from different backgrounds, the vast majority have one thing in common - their names have been connected with opposition to British rule in Ireland. Those detained need not be Irish. British trade unionists who speak out on Ireland and seek to win opposition to Britain's colonial war have also been held under the PTA.

The PTA is directed against the working class. But it is not simply another assault on basic democratic rights. It can only be fought by confronting the specific issues which gave rise to the PTA - British imperialism's twin objectives of restricting the war to the Six Counties and silencing all opposition to British rule in Ireland. Lord Shackleton, who reviewed the working of the Act in August 1978, wrote: 'In Great Britain, the principal emphasis is on the prevention of acts of violence originating from across the Irish Sea' (Review of the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1974 and 1976, Cmnd 7324, 1978, p16). In other words the Irish War must not disturb the British political scene. By loudly proclaiming its support for the struggle of the Irish people for national liberation, the British working class must ensure that the PTA fails in this objective.

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency calls for opposition to the PTA in order to challenge the climate of fear that the British state is trying to encourage on the question of Ireland. Every opportunity must be seized to expose the true role of British imperialism in Ireland. The activities, pickets and protests we have organised against the PTA are not merely intended to defend the victims of the British state. They are essential steps towards building a clear class opposition to British imperialism. In supporting victims of the PTA the British working class is not simply doing the Irish people a favour. Support for the anti-imperialist movement is entirely in the interests of British workers. It will strengthen the working class in its struggle against British imperialism and force the British state to fight on two fronts. This is a combination that imperialism will not be able to contain.

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