

HANDS OFF IRELAND!

"I have already agreed that the work being done by the trade unions is first rate... Mr Jack Jones was in Ireland last week speaking at the annual conference of the TGWU. What he said there could not be bettered. That shows that the valued support that the Government and the country get from the British trade union movement on the Irish question is first rate".

Merlyn Rees, Hansard, 1st August 1976.

"If the socialists of Britain do not recognise and uphold Ireland's right to secession..... it is solely because they are in fact imperialists, not socialists. It is ridiculous to cherish illusions that people who do not fight for 'the right to self-determination' of the oppressed nations, while they themselves belong to the oppressor nations, are capable of practising socialist policies".

V.I. Lenin, Collected Works. Vol. 21 p.294

Preface

The contents of this bulletin were originally intended for inclusion in the first of a series of quarterly bulletins on Ireland, published by the Revolutionary Communist Group. This was before the split in the RCG which involved the expulsion of nearly half of its membership by a majority faction of its Political Committee (MFPC). Among those expelled was the Editor of the Bulletin — Chris Davies; two other political committee members — Judith Harrison and Frank Richards; and the authors of all the articles in this bulletin.

The expulsions were justified on the trumped-up charge of 'chauvinism with regard to the South African Movement'. The sole evidence advanced for this was that a number of the expelled comrades were against remaining silent at a recent conference called by the Anti-Apartheid Movement on South Africa. These comrades argued instead that RCG delegates

should be free to combat the reactionary views presented by speakers from the platform at the conference — speakers who are members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). In so arguing the comrades were going against the majority faction of the political committee by refusing to make opportunist and concessionary overtures to the CPGB. The orientation of the MFPC represented a sharp break with the previous political orientation of the RCG when it openly and fully attacked the politics of the CPGB (see the pamphlet — Ireland: British Labour and British Imperialism). We have confronted the CPGB politically, because its reformist and chauvinist politics are a barrier to the development of an internationalist current in the working class and are also a barrier to developing effective solidarity movements in this country whether on Ireland or on South Africa.

The expelled comrades have now formed themselves into the Revolutionary Communist Tendency and will be carrying on the struggle to defend and take forward the politics contained in the propaganda published by the RCG prior to the split.

The articles in this bulletin have not been discussed by the RCT since its formation. They express the political positions of their authors and do not necessarily represent the collective opinion of the RCT. We have gone ahead with the publication of these articles, despite the split, in order to further political discussion on the question of Ireland in the labour movement. Further details of the course being followed by the RCT, together with copies of our reply to the MFPC's statement of expulsion can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to:

BM RCT, LONDON, WC1V 6XX.

Steering Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency.

If you would like more information about the Revolutionary Communist Tendency please write to BM RCT, LONDON, WC1V 6XX.

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HANDS OFF IRELAND!

Editorial

In 1920, in one of the most militant years of British labour history, dock workers assigned to the Jolly George joined in the Hands Off Russia campaign by stopping the shipment of a cargo of arms and equipment destined for the white armies invading the USSR. The war in Ireland, however, provoked no such response. There was no Hands Off Ireland campaign. As J.T. Murphy remarked, 'Munitions, troops, equipment went as usual. Not once did British Labour hold up a single waggon of munitions or prevent the transport of a single soldier, whilst the common imperialist enemy delivered blow on blow'. (Labour Monthly March 1923).

Then, as now, opposition to the Irish war was muted in the British labour movement. The Special Labour Party Conference of 1921, while calling for self-determination for Ireland, added the proviso that it must not become 'a military or naval menace to Britain'. In this way, the labour movement showed that it was still bound by chauvinism — it had not broken with the idea of defending the interests of its own national capitalist state. From such a standpoint, it was unable to challenge the imposition of Partition on

Ireland or to defend its own interests in the teeth of betrayal by its leadership in 1926.

Today as capitalism once more plunges the world into depression, the working class is faced with the very same difficulties. It has yet to assert its own interests independently from those of the ruling class. The clearest testimony to this lack of independence is shown by the general acceptance that both wage controls and public sector cut backs have commanded — however grudgingly — in the labour movement. Only recently, Denis Healey has felt able to boast that:

"There is no country in the world where wage costs are increasing less than they are in Britain in the coming year". (Industrial Management September 1976).

The British labour movement, one of the oldest and strongest in the world, is unable to defend itself against such sharp attacks. Setting nation before class it seeks solutions to the crisis which are in the national interest. Even as it takes its first halting steps of opposition to the public sector cuts, it does so on the

basis of a narrow divisive platform — appealing for import controls and curbs on capital export so that Britain's competitiveness on the world market can be restored.

The nation is no neutral concept shared by the classes that constitute it. Defence of the nation means defence of *capitalism*. Making the nation competitive means restoring *capitalist* profitability. The national interest and the interests of the working class pull in opposite directions.

The attitude of the labour movement to Ireland is one of the clearest expressions of the identification of the British working class with its own nation state. There is near unanimous acceptance of the right of the British state to occupy Ireland with its troops and to enforce whatever solutions it sees fit. There is near unanimous rejection of the concept that the Irish people as a whole have the right to work out a solution free from British military intervention. True the expression of this standpoint which the working class shares with the capitalist class differs depending upon whether it is voiced at the Tory Party conference or at the TUC. The Tories argue unambiguously for keeping the troops in Ireland because it is in the interests of British capital and the British nation to do so. In this they are merely expressing the true interests of their class. The TUC, Communist Party (CP) and Labour Party (LP) on the other hand, argue for keeping British troops in Ireland because it is in the interest of the Irish people to have them there.

Holding to the concept of the national interest the TUC and the parties of the left fear a resolution of the conflict which would threaten the stability of the British nation state. Anything which is seen as a threat to the nation is seen also as a threat to the working class. And so, they cannot understand how a British withdrawal could be in the interests of the British working class and the Irish people. Rather they assume that the continued annexation of part of Ireland by the British state, given the historical strength of the British labour movement can only be of benefit to the Irish as a whole.

This explains the bond that exists between the capitalist class and the traditional organisations of the working class on the question of Ireland. In the quotation printed on the front cover, Merlyn Rees has even felt able to congratulate the trade union movement for the 'valued' and 'first class' support that it gives to government and country (a change from king and country!) over the question of Ireland. Politics, of course, dictated that he omit the Communist Party from his

commendation, but by any logic, it ought to have been included along with the Labour Party left.

This 'Broad Left Alliance' rests its case for supporting the occupation of Ireland on a crutch labelled civil war. It is a crutch which the capitalists have been only too willing to embellish with grisly scenarios about what might happen — in Ireland and in Britain — if the troops were withdrawn before law and order was restored. Significantly, however, they have not been so forthcoming with scenarios involving the actual restoration of 'law and order'. They have not explained the extent of the repression that will be required. They have refrained from pointing out that it is of such an order that it can only be carried through when the national capitalist class in Southern Ireland has muzzled all opposition there and when democratic rights in Britain have been whittled further away by repressive legislation. In the meantime, as long as the 'low profile' continues they are indebted to the Communist Party and the TUC for peddling the idea that the British Army can be transformed into an instrument of progress and peace.

The 'Broad Left Alliance', with the CP at its head, looks anxiously for a solution involving neither upheaval nor repression; a proposed solution that at various times has taken on the form of support for a Bill of Rights, for a 'Better Life for All' and for the 'Women for Peace'. In putting forward these initiatives, the CP will of course refer to the excesses of British Imperialism. But nothing that it says or does in any way imperils the rule of that imperialism. This is most clearly seen when we consider the question of the recent peace marches and the way they were taken up in the labour movement. The peace marches expressed the anger and frustration of the middle-class women of Northern Ireland that the stability of their comfortable routine, so rudely interrupted in 1969, had not yet been restored. Understandably, the peace marches were greeted less than favourably in the Catholic working class areas, where the restoration of stability carries with it the implication of further army violence and repression.

The capitalist press reacted to the peace marches with the same enthusiasm with which it supported the march of the Leyland wives in 1975. But the true nature of the peace movement as a class collaborationist force became more and more difficult to conceal. In the working class, Turf Lodge district of Belfast in mid-October a meeting was called to protest at the murder of 13 year old Brian Stewart, one of the many casual-

ties of army violence that month. His skull had been fractured by a British army plastic bullet fired at close range. The organisers of the peace marches, attempting to cash in on the protest, so incensed local residents by their presence that they had to be rescued by local Sinn Féin officials.

Ten days later, an attempt to hold a peace rally in the Falls Park, Belfast came to a sudden end when 3,000 local residents vented their anger at what they regarded as a call for further repression. Even the *Daily Telegraph* had to report that the response to the peace marchers from most of the by-standers was one of 'sullen hostility'... 'The pro-IRA March, complete with swirling republican bands, earned warmer applause than the joint Protestant—Catholic Peace March' (*Daily Telegraph* 25.10.76)

The response of the Communist Party to the Peace Marches was less honest than that of the *Daily Telegraph*. Acutely aware that its line on Ireland is no more than a left gloss on the government's own strategy, it attempted to justify the line by building up the Peace Movement as a credible, representative and progressive force in the eyes of the British working class. It declared that 'the opportunity provided by the new Peace Movement must not be lost'. (*Morning Star*, 14.10.76). The C.P. journal, *Comment*, went out of its way to insist that the Peace Marchers were 'against all forms of violence':

"They see the British Army as a party to the conflict, as a contributor to the violence..... the Peace Movement has not as the British government would like, demanded support for the so-called 'security forces', it has not supported the imperialist policy of Peace through repression'. (*Comment* 16.10.76).

Unfortunately for the CP, however, the Peace March organisers have done precisely this. The doves that the CP hoped to nurture have turned into hawks. Having failed to attract the support of working class Catholics the organisers have no longer any need to pretend whose side they are on:

"Our attitude to the security forces is this. We fully support the rule of law and until the Northern Irish community themselves evolve their own new community institutions and form of government then the RUC and the other security forces are the only legitimate upholders of the rule of law'. (Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, *Morning Star* 14.10.76)

The CP has not understood, and given its standpoint, cannot understand, that peace will only come about in Ireland

when the British state ceases its military intervention. Without this, there can be no peace, only pacification. Any attempt to create the conditions for peace while accepting the right of the British state to occupy Ireland must involve an attempt to isolate and weaken those who are in the forefront of the fight to remove the imperialist army. What is put forward in the name of progress by the Communist Party, TUC and Labour left is nothing less than a recipe for the defeat of the Republican movement and therefore the working class, and the triumph of the British state in Ireland.

Hands Off Ireland makes its appearance at a time when the urgent question facing anti-imperialists is on what political basis can a movement be built in solidarity with the Irish struggle? What is the relation between the struggle to build this movement and the struggle for socialism in Britain? We argue that the two are in no way separable. The crisis of capitalism, its inability to bring about sustained peace and development necessitates an attack both on the workers of the imperialist nations and on the mass of the peoples in the colonies and neocolonies. For the British working class it is a question of recognising the 'common imperialist enemy' i.e. its own state. It cannot be socialist in Britain and imperialist in Ireland. And neither can it come out in support of the Irish struggle as long as it accepts national interest type arguments in defence of its own state. That is the revolutionary theme that runs throughout this bulletin.

The article: *Lessons of TOM* shows how the only movement that can be built on the Irish question is one that argues in the working class against the ideas of the neutral state and the national interest. Any repressive solution planned by the British state must take into account the opposition throughout Ireland to British rule in the north. In the article *The Dublin Government — Partners in Imperialism* we show how the heightening of repression in the south of Ireland reflects the determination of the national capitalist class to serve and support its imperialist master — the British state: The working class no less than the republican movement will be at the receiving end of this repressive power.

Other articles on the treatment of political prisoners, on torture and on the role of the capitalist press illustrate the ruthless manner in which imperialism impresses its rule on Ireland and the depths of barbarity to which it is forced to descend to ensure its own survival.

Chris Davies. December 1976.

LESSONS OF THE TROOPS OUT MOVEMENT

Jim Johnson

(This article is based on the RCG statement of resignation from the Troops Out Movement November 1976 — available separately).

There have been a number of attempts by the left in the last eight years to build an anti-imperialist movement in support of the Irish struggle. The Irish Solidarity Campaign, Anti-Internment League and Troops Out Movement (TOM) have all had an initial impact, only to fall eventually by the wayside as a result of their political inadequacies. The latest attempt, that of the TOM, was perhaps the most hopeful insofar as it saw its tasks as taking its demands into the working class. Basing itself on the demand — Troops Out Now — it had the opportunity of concretely arguing in the labour movement the necessity for the ending of British domination in Ireland. By showing that it was the presence of the troops in Ireland that maintained the divisions in the working class it could have demonstrated the necessity for the British working class to take up the struggle against British imperialism. But the TOM has been unable to show why the British working class must take up the Troops Out Now demand: rather it has abandoned the demand itself. The result has been a political degeneration in the TOM and its organisational expression — a declining membership.

The RCG has consistently argued that the demands Troops Out Now and Self-Determination for the Irish People are not just demands to be taken up at opportune moments of the struggle but are central to the defence of the interests of the British and Irish working class. The occupation of Northern Ireland by Britain is maintained because without it the continuance of imperialist rule would be placed

in jeopardy. Repression is a necessary consequence of imperialist occupation. During the period of the post war boom it was not possible to transform the Northern Ireland statelet, from its sectarian nature to a 'normal' bourgeois democracy. In a period of world capitalist crisis that becomes all the more difficult.

The movement for democratic rights — for self-determination — threatens capitalist stability and must be put down by repression:

"Britain cannot afford a Palestinian-type solution just off her western coast. A quarter of a century after we pulled out, there is still fighting between Jew and Arab, which is a major hazard to international peace. But it is no longer a strategic area for us. Ireland is and always will be". (Sir Frederick Catherwood, CBI ex-President quoted in *The Ulster Debate*, Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1972).

The struggle in Ireland for the democratic right of self-determination is not a struggle for a gradual transformation because this is not possible in Ireland. The struggle for self-determination constitutes a fundamental challenge to imperialism itself.

This has decisive consequences for the British working class and its tasks in relation to Ireland. For to argue anything less than Troops Out Now, to argue for example for a Bill of Rights, is not only utopian, in that it attempts to make capital do what it cannot do, it is also reactionary. For it can only mean a continuation of British repression with a 'human-face'. On the other hand to argue for Troops Out Now means making a fundamental challenge to British Imperialism. The only way in which the working class of Britain can

show solidarity with the Irish struggle is to call into question the power and control of the state itself. As we argued in *Revolutionary Communist 2*:

"There is no permanent solution in Ireland which does not pose the destruction of imperialism, of the ruling class in Ireland and Britain".

The necessary conclusion to be drawn was — and is — that the struggle against the British state and the struggle in solidarity with the Irish people are the same. There can be no question of a real movement arising on the Irish question which does not start from this premise. Troops Out Now makes no sense as a slogan or demand outside of the open struggle against British capital itself.

The RCG joined the TOM because it agreed with its platform — Troops Out Now, Self-Determination for the Irish People as a Whole. It is a platform which at one and the same time provides a basis for a struggle against national chauvinism and against imperialist domination. It is the concrete expression of an independent working class standpoint on the Irish question. Having joined the TOM, however, we soon discovered that the movement did not understand its own platform in a revolutionary way — but merely saw it as a tactical manoeuvre. TOM has been only too willing to abandon its demands when confronted by the dominant chauvinist position in the working class, i.e. the call for a Bill Of Rights. Over the last 18 months it has not mobilised for a single event under the banner of its platform. Its refusal to adopt an anti-imperialist standpoint was revealed most strikingly in the mobilisation for the Bloody Sunday Commemoration Committee

demonstration. Rather than argue the necessity for **Troops Out Now** it adopted the tactful slogan 'End British Involvement'. By means of this manoeuvre it hoped to seduce 'broad layers' into 'unity in action' and force its much sought after (though never found) war weary liberals onto the streets. In such events we can recognise the politics of the International Marxist Group (IMG) which has recently argued that:

"The TOM should not be a socialist organisation appealing only to left-wing groups and conscious supporters of the anti-imperialist struggle. It should be organised on the single issue of Ireland and open to all those who agree with the TOM demands. This criteria applies not only to the LP and CP members but Young Liberals, republican organisations, trade unions, soldiers, relatives and cultural organisations'. (*IMG TOM National Delegate Conference document April 1976.*)

Although the IMG are careful enough to refer to the TOM demands this is no more than window dressing. **Troops Out Now** is a demand with revolutionary consequences. In today's conditions it is only the working class which has a fundamental interest in supporting this platform. The search for a 'broad layer' must inevitably involve, as it has done, a dilution of the TOM platform, preventing real opposition to British imperialism from emerging.

TOM's pre-occupation with 'unity in action' cannot take up the CP's proposal for a Bill of Rights, which is put forward as the first step to the solution of the 'Irish troubles', and the first step towards self-determination. Irene Brennan, an Executive member of the CP has expressed this position most clearly, she writes:

'real progress for Northern Ireland will lead towards the direction of full Irish self-determination. But that cannot be achieved without building unity between sections of people in the north and south. An essential condition of this is the introduction of full democracy in the North'. (*Northern Ireland: A Programme for Action* page 23).

The TOM cannot argue against the CP because it does not take up the anti-chauvinist struggle. Unless this is done, the British working class will not oppose its ruling class's domination of Ireland. The British state cannot play a 'progressive' role in Ireland, because imperialist domination is not a policy, but a necessity for British capital. The TOM is unable to explain this, and is therefore unable to counter arguments which propose British parliamentary solutions to Irish problems.

It was for these reasons that the RCG argued against the TOM Labour Movement Delegation to Ireland. The political basis of this delegation can be judged from the following report:

'Among the sponsors are 14 MP's including Ms Joan Maynard who says she supports the delegation because it is based on the principle of self-determination for the Irish people and in no way implies support for TOM or its demands'. (*Morning Star* 17.9.76).

Joan Maynard also spoke on the TOM platform at a meeting held during the Labour Party Conference and said that she did not go all the way with TOM. This is no problem as the TOM does not go all the way itself. At this meeting the TOM banner behind the platform read 'TOM—Britain must withdraw'. No mention of **Troops Out Now**.

TOM's own propaganda on the delegation hails it as a 'positive step towards developing a progressive policy which would ensure a just and lasting solution to the "Irish problem"'. 'Nowhere is there an indication of what this policy might be; no hint that the only 'progressive policy' for the British working class is the campaign for **Troops Out Now** and Self-Determination, and that any other standpoint serves to strengthen imperialism. Even supporters of TOM, wise after the event, cast doubt on the benefits of the Delegation.

"It remains to be seen whether or not the delegation can have a significant impact in Britain. But if nothing else is achieved, fifty odd members of the British labour movement have seen something of the reality of British occupation of Ireland". (*Red Weekly* 30.9.76)

As we have already argued, a movement cannot be built on the politics of adaptation. The pursuit of such politics inevitably leads to demoralisation and decline. Rather than confront this fact, however, TOM has blamed its own decline on such bogeys as press censorship.

'The Labour Government, fearing that the feeling for withdrawal might be channelled into a mass campaign has taken steps to counteract the growth of this mood. It has successfully leaned on the mass media to suppress news of the war, hoping that if it goes unreported people will think it has ceased'. (*Troops Out, Summer 1976*).

It is difficult to believe that the TOM inhabit the same world as the British working class when such arguments are used. Censorship exists, but not in the form that TOM imagines. Almost daily, news bulletins scream out, 'More violence tonight in Northern Ireland' followed by

a condemnation of 'terrorists' and so on. In August, the *Daily Mail* under the front page headline 'Rough Justice' described a scene in Derry where soldiers:

'grabbed six of the rioters, punched them, clubbed them, banged their heads against a wall and dragged them off, bleeding and sobbing to the cells'.

Far from suppressing news of the war the ruling class when it suits it uses this type of propaganda exercise to maintain its alliance with the working class. By portraying the defenders of the Catholic areas as 'rioters' and 'terrorists' it can rest assured of the support of the labour movement for their suppression. It is precisely this which TOM fails to understand — the hold of chauvinism and reformism in the working class.

The majority of the labour movement in this country has given its opinion on the Irish question. It has differences with the ruling class not over whether the troops should be in Ireland but what they should be doing there. In 1972 and again in 1975 it has called through the TUC Congress for the introduction of a Bill of Rights. More recently the TUC has supported the utopian demand for a 'Better Life for All', a 'better life' which would be imposed by the British State.

The fight against such a 'solution' is the central task. This fight requires a head-on-challenge to the grip of reformism in the working class. This can only be done by demonstrating concretely that the capitalist state can only defend the interests of capitalism. We have to be able to show that there is no solution to the Irish crisis unless British imperialism is defeated. Further there is no solution to the problems confronting the British working class unless British imperialism is defeated. This is the unity of the struggle of the Irish and the British working class. The choice is clear: the opportunist politics of the TOM and no anti-imperialist movement; or revolutionary propaganda in the working class and the laying of the basis for an anti-imperialist movement.

The revolutionary road, if it is not to emulate the progress of the TOM, must be built on the firmest foundations. That is why we speak not yet of a movement but of building the basis for a movement. By this we mean the propaganda work that trains a growing vanguard around the central questions and answers of the Irish struggle. The arguments to stress are: (1) the impossibility of general reforms in this period (2) the necessity for the British army to stay in Ireland if the interests of British imperialism are not to

suffer a crippling blow and (3) the corresponding necessity to challenge the national interest arguments that reformism and social democracy feed on. If this stage is skipped, if the kind of propaganda we have been arguing for is not prioritised, no movement will emerge on the Irish question except as a transitory response to army activity. The RCG has begun this work:

In Revolutionary Communist No 2 we have shown through a materialist analysis of the Irish question that the very survival of British imperialism is at stake in the Irish struggle.

We have published the only comprehensive critique of the Bill of Rights position and the reformist arguments of the CPGB in our pamphlet — *'Ireland — British Labour and British Imperialism'*.

We have argued in trades councils and in trade union branches for the initiation and sponsorship of labour movement bulletins as a forum of debate on the Irish question.

The reaction of TOM and the radical left to the development of the only

materialist analysis of the Irish question has been absolute silence. Their reaction to the only systematic critique of the dominant position in the labour movement has again been silence. When we raised the question of producing propaganda in the labour movement through the initiation of bulletins, the TOM and the radical left attempted to silence this too. In Hackney Trades Council TOM supporters joined with the CP in blocking the proposal. In Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council, the IMG moved an amendment that the bulletin should be a 'general labour movement bulletin', i.e. one that did not have British imperialism in Ireland as its central theme. In Wandsworth Treachers Association, members of the Workers' League and the CPBML voted *against* a challenge to the chair when the motion calling for a bulletin was ruled out of order. The chair justified this ruling on the grounds that it would give the Association a bad name to support the bulletin in the light of the bombing campaign in Britain.

The revolutionary significance of the Irish question inevitably divides those who are prepared to wage a principled struggle against British imperialism and those opp-

ortunists who prefer a cosy relationship with the reformist left. In leaving TOM we call on all those who agree with our standpoint on Ireland to support **Hands Off Ireland**, and to ensure that it achieves the widest circulation in the labour Movement. The months ahead will be crucial in testing out any undercurrents of revolt in the working class on this question. The failure of TOM must not be seen as a demoralising blow but as the spur to building a genuine anti-imperialist movement in the future.

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THE DUBLIN GOVERNMENT

Francis Burke

The state of the southern Irish economy was well characterised recently by a decision of the EEC Commission to declare it a 'disaster area'. The Financial Times headline: 'From Golden Boy to Deadbeat' (11.9.76) sums up how the world crisis of capitalism has shattered all possibility of southern Ireland emerging from the economic abyss to which imperialism has historically consigned it. Recent reports from the National Economic and Social Council and the Economic and Social Research Institute confirm this picture. The government has had to borrow heavily from international bankers to cover successive budget deficits, and inevitably the working class are bearing the brunt of the recession. Inflation is double that in Britain and still rising. The true level of unemployment, according to the Financial Times is about 18% or nearly one in five of the labour force.

Predictably, the ruling class has not hesitated to attack workers for not accepting further cuts in living standards. The Prime Minister, Liam Cosgrave, has had the following to say:

'Those who would pursue such a course of action (reject the proposed National Wage Agreement — Ed) would bear a heavy responsibility for the pursuit of narrow sectional interests at this time which would tear our society apart'. (*Irish Times* 1.7.76).

And more recently, the government's economic 'plan' has referred to the 'selfish attitudes and actions on the part of sectional or minority groups'.

The ranting and raving over wage levels are of course common to the capitalist class of all nations. What is particular about the Irish situation is the severity with which the world crisis is affecting the country and the extent of the wage cuts which are necessary. The uneven development of capitalism has stamped various parts of the world as economically advanced or backward. Capitalism cannot reverse or overcome this disparity but inevitably tends to reinforce it. This is the meaning of the imperialist epoch, an epoch which is characterised by a conflict among advanced nations for the exploitation of the weaker economies. At times of crisis the conflict and exploitation express themselves most nakedly.

Ireland is, despite the development of recent years, an economically backward country where the industries controlled by national capital and interests are disintegrating — they are

opened up to international competition. Recognising this, the capitalist class has had no option but to subordinate its own direct interest to those of foreign capital which is offered massive concessions to arrange the efficient exploitation of Irish workers. The national capitalists play the role of junior partners and share accordingly in the profits extracted.

This dependence on foreign investment places the southern Irish ruling class in a contradictory position. The running of its own economy, i.e. the ability to exploit its own working class is the objective of every national capitalist class. But for the Irish capitalists to challenge the domination of foreign capital would be a slippery and dangerous path, with every likelihood that it would be trampled underfoot by those who had most to gain in resolutely opposing imperialism — the Irish working class.

For the Irish ruling class there is only one possible strategy to follow. To stay firmly in the saddle it must crush that class whose interests are most irreconcilable with its own — the working class. As yet however it is in no position to carry this through to a successful conclusion. The trade union movement is organisationally strong with a tradition of militancy unequalled in developed capitalist countries. Recent months have seen the unions reject the 1976-77 National Wage Agreement, an eight-week bank strike involving serious damage to Irish capital and a multitude of unofficial strikes. In contrast to the 4½% rise negotiated in Britain, the pay agreement in Southern Ireland would have meant an increase of 13%. Even the trade union bureaucrats have felt obliged to respond to the prevailing militancy with fighting talk. The general secretary of the ICTU for instance has had the following to say:

'There is no possibility of the Irish trade union movement agreeing to a

course of action which can only result in a steady decline of wages and the advertisement of Ireland as the place where cheap labour is available'.

(*Irish Times* 22.1.76)

But whether the trade union movement agrees or disagrees, this is what the maintenance of the capitalist system dictates, as the Dublin government well understands. In the recent period it has pursued a course of ideological pressure on the one hand and threatened confrontation on the other. Rising unemployment is blamed on the unions while simultaneously legislation is introduced to begin to curb their power. The Bank Remuneration Act introduced to freeze the pay of bank workers and the provision for classifying certain strikes as subject to the notorious Offences against the State Act indicate that the Government will not baulk at open confrontation when the opportune moment arrives.

Although the militant tradition of Irish trade unions stands in favour of the working class, struggle on economic issues alone will not allow it to defend its living standards. High unemployment is already sapping some of the militancy. The bank workers' strike was defeated. The unions have now accepted an interim settlement as a prelude to further talks on a national wage agreement. If a political alternative is not taken up by the trade union membership, the government will succeed in driving down wages through unemployment, ideological pressure and later open coercion. The only effective defence of working class living standards at a time of crisis lies in the growth of political consciousness welding together the working class in a party based on a revolutionary commitment to overthrow capitalism.

In developing this consciousness, the working class will be brought face to

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face with the inability of its own ruling class to offer concessions or to introduce reforms. Economic control lies elsewhere than with the national capitalist class. As the Financial Times bluntly put it:

'...the Irish government is far from being able to control its own economy as the external value of its currency and even the interest rates that it

can obtain here (in Ireland) are largely under British influence'.
(*Financial Times* 11.9.76)

The economic struggle of workers in Ireland inevitably comes up against the domination of the country by international capital. This is the power that stands behind the Irish state. British capital is the key element of this power in that the British state has

been historically charged with overseeing capitalist interests in Ireland. As the crisis develops further the economic struggle in Ireland will only be taken forward if it is linked to an anti-imperialist programme — one that simultaneously confronts the Irish state and British domination.

The threat of such an eventuality is well recognised by the ruling class and it underlies its determination first of all to eliminate the most immediate threat, the Republican Movement, before taking on the trade unions and the labour movement generally. A minister in the Dublin government, Conor Cruise O'Brien, has spelt out his plan of reaction as one parallel to that pursued by Major-General Eanes and the leaders of the Portuguese Socialist Party in strangling the Portuguese revolution:

'...it is only prudent to work on the assumption that the coming year

Chronology of repression 1976

February: After his death in Wakefield prison, arrangements were made to fly the body of Provisional IRA hunger striker Frank Stagg to Dublin Airport. The Government refused to let the body be flown to Dublin and diverted the plane to Shannon. The remains were buried in a grave prepared by the Government and burial in a republican plot was not allowed. Having posted armed guards at the grave for several weeks, the authorities then covered the plot over with concrete.

April: At 7.30 a.m. on the 7th April, the Special Branch carried out a series of raids in Dublin. 22 people were arrested — mainly members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP). 15 reported that they were deprived of sleep and food and were kicked and beaten. Doctors later confirmed the injuries. The majority were later released without charges being brought.

A demonstration called by Provisional Sinn Féin to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Easter Rising — an event commemorated by the Government itself in previous years — was declared illegal by the Government. Civil servants and state employees were threatened with loss of pension rights if they attended. 33 people

— including a Labour member of the Dail — were fined for participating in the meeting.

June: Noel and Marie Murray were sentenced to death for alleged murder of an off-duty policeman. The defendants declared themselves to be opposed to the state and refused to participate in their mock trial by a Special Criminal court. They were sentenced without a jury and the only evidence was 'confessions' extracted under duress by the police. The accused were not present for two thirds of the proceedings.

July: The Supreme Court allowed proceedings to begin against Hibernia and the Irish Times for contempt. The offence was to print letters criticising the conduct of the Special Criminal Court in the Murray case.

September: The Irish current affairs journal, Hibernia, appeared with two blank pages where an article naming RUC officers involved in torture of republicans in the north of Ireland was to have been printed. Irish Times Ltd. had refused to print the article for fear of legal action. The article has now appeared without the names of the officers.

October: The Financial Times (18th October) reported that the government had instructed the RTE state broadcasting authority to ban the Provisional and Official IRA and the Provisional Sinn Féin from all radio and TV programmes.

The Times (1st October) reported that the government planned a new, no-jury Special Criminal Court to deal with the

backlog of cases. Since the Court was first opened to deal with political offences in May 1972, there have been 772 convictions in 1,042 cases. The Times also reported that part of Curragh military camp has been converted to a prison layout as part of 'contingency plans for an increase in Provisional IRA prisoners.'

These are actions with which the southern government has taken over the past year. The government has now at its disposal the recently passed **Criminal Law Act** and the **Emergency Powers Act**.

The Criminal Law Act

† Gives the army the right to arrest and detain 'suspects'.

† Allows the closure of buildings believed to be used for 'unlawful' organisations for 12 months at the request of a police chief-superintendent.

† Allows prison warders to search prisoners, their relatives and legal representatives.

† Increases the sentences which the Special Criminal Court (which sits without a jury) can impose for membership of an 'unlawful organisation' from 2 to 7 years.

† Creates new offences such as 'obstruction of government' and 'usurpation of the functions of government'.

The Emergency Powers Act

+ Allows the police to detain suspects without charge or reference to a court for 7 days on the word of a police chief-superintendent.

† Allows the Government to declare an indefinite State of Emergency, which makes it impossible for the government to contravene the constitution.

may be one of increasing danger in which the security of the State may be challenged from various quarters. I believe the Labour Party under any such conditions which may arise will be no less determined in the defence of democracy that are our Portuguese comrades.'

(Speech to the Clontarf Constituency Council of the Irish Labour Party).

This 'defence of democracy' requires, it seems, the suspension of democracy. The repressive legislation recently introduced in southern Ireland involving the suspension in part of the constitution was hailed by the Daily Telegraph in August as the most draconian in any 'democracy':

As with other underdeveloped capitalist countries, repression is nothing new in Southern Ireland. The Offences against the State Act 1939, the wages standstill order and Emergency Powers Act of 1940, the reintroduction of internment in 1957, all testify to the ruthless determination of the national capitalist class to crush opposition to its rule. This class established its dominance in 1922 through the use of unbridled terror after the British army had handed over control to it in the South. 10,000 republicans and socialists were interned, over 50 were executed without trial, and all revolutionary groups were banned as treasonable in the following decade.

It is such an onslaught which the capitalist class is preparing for again in Ireland today, as it is buffeted by the storms of the world capitalist crisis. The ruling class is banking on the British army holding the north thus ensuring the Dublin government a free rein for the imposition of a regime of outright reaction. As the Tory spokesman on Ireland, Airey Neave frankly admitted at the Tory Party conference:

'It is not surprising that the Eire government is anxious to make sure that the troops stay in Ulster.'

The Tories recognise what is at stake in Ireland but no such clarity yet exists in the working class. If it did, if the questions of oppression and class solidarity were understood above the media's presentation of a battle between bigoted sectarians, the response from the working class would have been clear — for the immediate withdrawal of troops and solidarity with the Irish people against oppression.

The British press and imperialism; Daniel Lennon & Majella O'Hare

Daniel Shaw

The British government and press consistently claim that the British army is in Ireland to keep the peace. Yet in mid-August, British troops committed two murders without the slightest provocation. The murders resulted in the deaths of three children who happened to be nearby when one of the shootings took place. We are reproducing the facts in these cases — the cases of Daniel Lennon and Majella O'Hare — not because we believe that the murder of unarmed civilians is anything new to the conduct of the British army in Ireland. We do so because we believe that British workers must above all know the truth about Ireland today. This is especially important when the truth shows that the British army is not 'keeping the peace' at all, but is in fact carrying out a murderous campaign in order to maintain the domination of British capital over the Irish people. It is especially important when it shows how the army propaganda machine works and how the British press covers up the traces which the Army leaves behind.

The facts relating to the first murder are the following:

* On 10th August Daniel Lennon, a member of the Provisional IRA was shot dead by an army patrol while driving through Andersonstown, West Belfast.

* The car went out of control and crashed into a crowd of civilians on the pavement, killing three children and severely injuring their mother.

* As Lennon's companion climbed from the car he was hit three times by shots from British soldiers, despite the fact that he was directly in front of the injured Maguire family.

* Instead of calling an ambulance — which arrived only after some 25 minutes — the soldiers concerned themselves with hauling Lennon's body

from the car and seizing an Armalite rifle from the back seat.

* A British army spokesman immediately issued a statement that shots had been directed at them from the car and that they themselves had fired only in response to this action.

Now let us see how this incident was used by the British press to discredit the Republican Movement, each paper reporting details which contradict the accounts given in the other papers. The Sun (11.8.76) stated that the incident arose when the army, suspecting an attempted ambush, 'deliberately broke cover to draw three gunmen out of' a butcher's shop in Andersonstown. The Times (11.8.76), however, contains no such exciting stories about attempted ambushes. More simply, the troops were fired on in Andersonstown, returned fire and gave chase when two 'gunmen' drove off in a car. They then 'opened fire on the gunmen as a rifle was seen at the car window'. In the Daily Mail report 'an army Land-Rover patrol raced out of nearby barracks' after 'troops spotted a Provisional IRA gunman jumping into a car after sniping at soldiers. Lennon's companion, we learn, was carrying a gun when he got out of the car. In the other papers, however, it is stated that the soldiers took the gun from the car. The Morning Star for instance, who devoted a mere seven sentences to the story, taken from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, stated that Lennon's companion fired from the other car before the army retaliated, and that a loaded rifle was found in the car.

In point of fact, however, no shots were fired from the car. They could not have been for the simple reason that the gun found in the car was a dismantled Armalite, as the report in the Irish Times of 14.8.76 makes clear. Lennon was thus murdered in cold blood, and the deaths of the three children blamed on him and his organisation. By this murder, the British army helped to create the conditions in which the 'Peace Marches' could gain strength. The British Government has seen these marches as a vital aid to its sustained attempt to isolate and destroy the Republican Movement before turning on the catholic population as a whole. The British government was prepared to use all means — including murder — to encourage the 'Peace Marches'.

The British army's next step was to shoot and kill 12 year old Majella O'Hare on her way to church in Ballymoyer, Co. Armagh, at 11.45 a.m. on

Sunday, 15th August. At 12.15 p.m. the army issued its first statement: gunmen had opened fire on an army patrol and a 12 year old girl had been hit; the army had not returned fire. The ink had scarcely dried on this statement before Betty Williams, leader of the middle class 'women for peace' had denounced the IRA using the army account of the shooting to whip up support for the 'Peace Marches'. But there were too many witnesses to the shooting, including Majella's father, for this story to stand and so just after 2pm. the army issued its second statement, to the effect that a gunman had opened fire on the Army patrol and it was 'believed' that the army may have returned fire. This 'belief' had become certain by 3.30 p.m. the time of the army's third statement.

Such a swift retraction of its own lies is unusual for the army press office. Its main function is to whitewash army terror and to dish up fabricated versions of events when army shootings take place. If a retraction is unavoidable, it is usually delayed long enough to ensure that the original story is given full coverage in the British press. But this shooting came at a politically sensitive time just when the 'Peace March' organisers were capitalising on the deaths of the Maguire children. Thus the army had no option but to admit the facts and a soldier has now been charged with manslaughter. This should not be taken too seriously, however. Of all the soldiers indicted for murder or manslaughter in recent years, the only one jailed was freed on appeal. Significantly, none of the press, with the exception of the Sunday Times, reported the army's chopping and changing of its story. This is not surprising. To do so would be to undermine the credibility of its own reportage which is often nothing more than verbatim accounts dictated from the army press office.

Inadequate and distorted reporting of events such as those described above have been the stuff of British press coverage of the war ever since the troops went in in 1969. Take for example two deaths which occurred in 1971. On 3rd September Angela Gallagher was killed by a bullet which had been aimed at a British army patrol in Belfast but had ricocheted off a wall. Both wings of the IRA denied responsibility. Three days later fourteen year old Annette McGavigan was killed by a British army bullet aimed, according to the army, at a sniper. The differing emotional content of the headlines used to announce

these two deaths reveal the bias of the press very clearly:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| The Times: | 4.9.71. 'Baby girl shot dead as wave of terrorist firing sweeps Belfast'.
7.9.71. 'Girl of 14 shot in Londonderry brings Ulster toll to 100 dead' |
| Daily Telegraph: | 4.9.71. 'IRA bullet kills baby in Belfast'.
7.9.71. 'Girl 14, shot in IRA—Army battle'. |
| Daily Mail: | 4.9.71. 'IRA gunman kills baby'.
8.9.71. 'Girl shot dead in gun battle'. |
| Daily Express: | 4.9.71. 'IRA in Street terror: baby shot dead'.
7.9.71. 'Girl of 14 killed in Derry cross-fire'. |

(E. McCann, *The British Press and Northern Ireland*, Northern Ireland Socialist Research Centre, 1972.)

These comparisons show us that biased reporting does not happen as a matter of chance. Rather it is a necessary aspect of the imperialist war. The job of the army is made that much easier when the full scale of its repression is obscured. In the last week of September the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association reported no less than *four* shootings of innocent civilians by the British Army. In the cases of Jim Campbell (shot whilst duck shooting near Crossmaglen) and a lorry driver shot at an army checkpoint in Co. Tyrone, the army has 'apologised'. They have not yet apologised for shooting a 23 year old woman and 18 year old Sammy Lynch — both shot in their cars for no apparent reason. The use of such methods of necessity involves press distortion. News is presented in a form which will gain the support — or at least the acquiescence — of the working class in the oppressor country. Only in certain circumstances (as today in the south of Ireland) will direct state censorship be required. In most cases the thousand threads of ideology and finance which bind the media to the needs of its ruling class will ensure that, as in the two cases examined above, the press will oblige its capitalist masters.

British 'peacekeeping' ~ British Torture

Phil Turner

When torture and barbaric treatment of political prisoners is exposed in Chile, Brazil or South Africa the voice of the British labour movement is often heard in condemnation of the brutalities of political repression. On the third anniversary of the coup in Chile in September this year, many trade union banners were seen on the streets of London and Glasgow, showing opposition to the Junta. Even such figures as Jack Jones of the TGWU — Whose record in support of wage restraint is well known — have added their names to the list of opponents of the Chilean regime. But the real nature of their internationalism is to be seen when torture is practiced, not only in South Africa, or Chile, but by the British state in a British colony, such as Ireland.

This is the importance of the recent Strasbourg case, where the European Commission of Human Rights found the British state guilty of torturing Republican internees. A detailed report of the proceedings has revealed that 'interrogation techniques' used at a British army barracks in 1971 (apart from the routine beatings and ill-treatment) included techniques of sensory deprivation. These were: covering the head with a thick, black hood, deprivation of sleep for several days, forcing victims to stand against a wall supported only by the finger-tips, and subjecting them to continuous 'white noise' from a machine specifically designed to induce disorientation in its victims. There can be no doubt that this is torture. Its effects are permanent. Victims have suffered severe depression, nightmares and hallucinations. Several have since suffered serious physical illness. One has died of a heart attack. These are typical side-effects of the 'traumatic neurosis' produced by this method of torture.

The British government has not attempted to deny that it practised these techniques on internees. Instead, the tortures have been presented by the state and its press simply as excesses which occurred in the past. Merlyn Rees, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, accused the Dublin government of 'raking over the past' in bringing the charges and the *Guardian* said that:

"Dublin will be guilty of torturing Northern Ireland if it goes on force-feeding the Provisionals with propaganda".
(*Guardian* 3.9.76)

The press faithfully reprinted government

statements which claimed that the sensory deprivation techniques had been abandoned and that 'action' had been taken against those responsible for their use. The *Times* leader of 9.9.76 went so far as to point out that the Strasbourg findings did not put Britain in the same league as 'Greece, Brazil, Iran, Argentine'. By trivialising the tortures and relegating them to history the British state hopes to discredit those who are pressing the charges and to preserve the image of its army as a 'peacekeeping force'.

The real facts of British torture in Ireland are a little different to those presented in the British press. The tortures took place at the same time as internment was introduced. By imprisoning hundreds of Republicans without trial and carrying out controlled experiments in sensory deprivation the army hoped to intimidate the Catholic population. The British army is not a peacekeeping force at all but is the last resort of British imperialism in its attempt to continue its political domination over the Irish people. It is prepared to use any methods to crush the minority who resist that domination. Torture is just one method which the British state has found necessary to beat the republican section of the population into submission.

Since British imperialism has already found it necessary to use torture, there is little doubt that it will find it necessary to use it again. The *Irish Times* 4.9.76, printed a Ministry of Defence statement which admitted that British soldiers were still receiving training in sensory deprivation techniques. The army has refused to state what 'action' it has taken against those responsible for the tortures, but the European Commission report indicates that several of the torturers have in fact been promoted at a very rapid rate. Such facts made ridiculous any claim that the tortures were excesses in the past.

In fact, for Irish workers, these revelations are nothing new. Torture and ill-treatment of Republicans are day to day events in the North of Ireland. They are reported every week in the Republican and Irish press. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association has stated its intention of taking more cases to the European Commission. We fully support the pressing of these cases. The more evidence is produced of British torture the clearer it will be that torture is a way of life for a ruling class which hypocritically claims to stand for the defence of 'democracy' and 'humanity' in Ireland.

The British left, however, has failed com-

pletely to grasp this central point — that torture is the necessary consequence of British occupation of Ireland. Left Labour M.P. Tom Litterick has shown this failure in a letter printed in the *Manchester Evening News*, where he discusses the question as if it were merely a matter of shame for the British people:

"The discomfort of the British people at the indictment of the European Commission of Human Rights is particularly hard to bear because we were not allowed to know what was being done in our name. The torture was done in secret and we hear of it in shame.... Freedom of information to replace the Official Secrets Act will restore not only our right to know but our right to be responsible for the suffering we may inflict on others". (*Manchester Evening News* 8.10.76).

Right wing commentators of the capitalist press have no such feelings of 'shame' and see the situation more clearly than Litterick can, as this *Daily Mail* article shows:

"This kind of interrogation was not pleasant, but it was necessary and nothing to be ashamed of". (3.9.76).

Tom Litterick clearly believes that torture is unnecessary in a society in which democracy and accountability are the keywords. But his argument is incapable of confronting a state which sees torture as a necessity to defend its interests in Ireland.

The Communist Party has gone further by demanding that the British state discipline its torturers and mend its ways in Ireland. General Secretary Gordon McLennan has commented:

"We condemn the torturers and the politicians who have covered up for them. But condemnation is not enough. The policy from which this foulness springs has to be ended. Repression, discrimination and deprivation must be replaced by peace, democracy and better living standards". (*Morning Star* 3.9.76)

But to point out that the government has sanctioned torture and then to demand in the same breath that it introduces democracy shows the utopianism of the Communist Party's arguments. The fact that torture has proved necessary for British imperialism shows that it is incapable of providing democracy and that the presence of the British army can solve none of the problems of the Irish people.

Tom Litterick and the Communist Party have failed this test of internationalism.

FREE ALL ANTI-IMPERIALIST PRISONERS OF WAR!

1. Political status

Hugh MacGrillen

'When the first boy or girl is sentenced after March 1st, will you march after us until we pull the town down? It might not all be down yet but by God, if it's necessary it'll come down, stone by stone'. (*An Phoblacht*, paper of the Provisional Sinn Féin, 9.8.76).

That remark by Maire Drumm, former Vice-President of Provisional Sinn Féin, who was murdered by Loyalists last October, earned her three weeks detention at the hands of the British administration in Northern Ireland. It demonstrates the determination of the Republican Movement to resist the ending of special category status for political prisoners in Northern Ireland and to oppose the brutal treatment meted out to republican prisoners in jails in Britain and in southern Ireland.

At present there are over two thousand prisoners held throughout Britain and Ireland for taking part in the anti-imperialist struggle. Most of these are held in Northern Ireland (Long Kesh now holds more people than at any previous time) and the vast majority are Republicans drawn from the catholic working class. Some 40 of the prisoners are held for no other offence than attempting to escape from internment.

Special category status for prisoners convicted of offences committed for political reasons was introduced by the Whitelaw administration in June 1972 following a hunger strike by Republican prisoners in Crumlin Road Jail, Belfast. The political significance of this concession is that it constitutes

When 'its own' ruling class is found guilty of torturing a people which it oppresses it is not enough for the labour movement to be critical of the methods used. It must understand that torture is a necessity — not for the 'British people' but for British imperialism — and take its stand clearly on the side of those who are fighting for their liberation. Only from this standpoint will it be possible to mobilise on the question of Ireland the same degree of opposition that questions such as Chile have aroused in the labour movement.

a recognition by the British State that the struggle in Ireland is to free the country of British domination. This made it very difficult for the British state to deny the political content of Republican violence. In consequence, much propaganda effort over the succeeding period has been put into portraying the Republicans as 'criminal lunatics', 'thugs', 'sectarian madmen' etc. A successful presentation of the IRA as a criminal gang would remove the politics from the national liberation struggle, isolate the Republicans and make it easy to dress up repression as 'peace-keeping'.

The capitalist press, especially in Britain, has done its best to downplay the political nature of the struggle and to present it as a question of 'law and order.' The hypocrisy of such a claim was graphically revealed by a recent article in the *Starry Plough*, paper of the Irish Republican Socialist Party. This showed that between September 1973 and May 1975, charges of assault, malicious wounding, murder and attempted murder were brought against 46 members of the security forces, resulting in 19 convictions and no jail sentences. It hardly needs to be added that the capitalist press did its best to hush up these incidents. Clearly, neither it nor the capitalist state is in any position to set itself up as arbitrator of what is criminal and what is political!

As part of the strategy of 'depoliticisation' i.e. denying the political content of the struggle, special category status for prisoners in Northern Ireland charged with offences committed after March 1st 1976 is being ended. In an effort to defuse the opposition that is building up to this step, there has been no attempt as yet to remove special category status from those charged with offences committed before this date. Nor has the British administration felt confident enough to implement the new proposals decisively. Only on September 14th was the first prisoner, Kieran Nugent sentenced to three years under the new rules. For refusing to wear prison clothes, Nugent has been held naked in solitary confinement. Before long, if the British state has its way, many other republican and republican socialist

prisoners will be receiving the same barbaric treatment.

The concessions involved in special category status — freedom to wear one's own clothes, more facilities for correspondence, weekly visits and food parcels from relatives, association with other political prisoners, the right to refuse penal work and to engage in handicraft and educational activities — meagre though they are, are well worth defending. They have been fought for also in southern Ireland where the harassment and intimidation of prisoners, particularly in Portlaoise Jail, leaves no doubt as to the viciousness of the Dublin government in its treatment of Republicans.

The British state rivals the Dublin government in viciousness. Hunger-striker Frank Stagg was starved to death rather than be given the right to transfer to a jail in Ireland. In Albany prison in September, republican prisoners who barricaded a corridor to protest at the brutal treatment of a comrade were almost torn apart by prison warders, encouraged no doubt by the acquittal of the Winson Green prison officers. Four were hospitalised; one — Sean Campbell — had a broken arm, broken leg, two broken fingers and fractured ribs. In Brixton, republican prisoner Patrick Joseph Hackett, who lost a leg in a recent explosion has been subjected to constant humiliation and abuse. Noel Jenkinson, republican and active trade unionist, framed and sentenced to 30 years for the Aldershot bombing died in October in the security wing of Leicester prison allegedly of a heart attack. Permission for an independent autopsy was refused at the inquest, just as the right to appeal against conviction had been denied him 4 years earlier. All this testifies to the hypocrisy of the British definition of criminal behaviour.

The British left has failed to support politically the case for the retention of special category status, as witnessed by the minute turn-out on the demonstration held in support of this demand on August 22nd. It was left mainly to the Republican Movement to protest and demonstrate. This is just one more example of the present impotence of the labour movement in the face of British imperialism's continuing plans to inflict itself on Ireland. The point that needs to be driven home in the British working class today is that the struggle for Irish freedom entails support for the freeing of all anti-imperialist prisoners and support for the campaign to defend political status.

2. Speech at Lincoln's Inn Field

Address by Chris Davies, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, 22nd August, 1976,
following the demonstration on political status organised by Provisional Sinn Féin.

Comrades,

We in the RCG have marched with you today to show our solidarity for the struggle that is being waged to defend political status. The whole strategy of British imperialism over the last two years in Ireland has been to obtain a breathing space for itself before commencing a new assault. This was the reasoning behind the so-called 'low profile' of the last period — a low profile that did not stop the army of occupation from engaging in planned selective assassinations such as that of Peter Cleary and others. The intention was to isolate the Republican Movement and to incorporate the middle class politicians of the SDLP into the six-county state machine. The attempt to remove political status is the culminating point of this strategy and we for our part recognise the importance of the campaign against this and pledge our full support on the basis of the slogans we have used on the march today: *Free all anti-imperialist political prisoners — Troops out now.*

For us in Britain, the major task is to lay the basis for building a movement in the working class in solidarity with the struggle of the Irish people. And here we must admit that the progress made in this regard has not been good. There is not a single trade union banner for instance on the demonstration today and there has only been a minimal turn out of left organisations. It is clear that although there is much talk of the unity and indivisibility of the struggle of the working class in Britain and that of the Irish people, the understanding of what this consists of and how it should be argued for is far from complete.

We in the RCG have consistently argued that the question that must be posed in the working class is the question: Why are there British troops in Ireland? And the answer we give to this question, an answer that clarifies the relation between the struggle of the Irish people and that of the working class in Britain, is that British troops are in Ireland because the consequences of their withdrawal would be a catastrophic blow to the interests

of British capital. It is the presence of British troops that sustains the sectarian orange statelet and that perpetuates the divisions in the Irish working class. At the present moment in Ireland, there are 200,000 men and women unemployed, the highest percentage of unemployment in Europe. In the coming period, as the world crisis of capitalism deepens further, the Irish working class will be asked to bear the burden of this crisis through lower wages and worsening conditions. But if this is to happen and if imperialism is not to suffer a defeat, the presence of the British army is essential.

It is this point that we must consistently argue in the British working class. The presence of the army in Ireland is not a policy for British imperialism; it is a dire necessity if it is not to suffer a major defeat. In this regard we must offer some words of fraternal criticism to the previous speaker who spoke of 'getting through to the thick skulls at Westminster'. This we believe is a misunderstanding of what is required. It is not at the politicians at Westminster (whose thick skulls do not prevent them from seeing that it is in the interests of their own skins to keep the army in Ireland) but at the British working class that we must aim our propaganda. It is clear that the British working class, influenced by centuries of chauvinist propaganda, does not yet understand what is at stake in Ireland. In 1971, 1972 and again in 1975, the TUC has voted overwhelmingly for a so-called 'Bill of Rights' or, to put it bluntly, for yet another British plan for Ireland. It is the domination of these ideas, vigorously supported by the reactionary arguments of the Communist Party of Great Britain, that we must make our central target in Britain. We must point out that far from it being possible for the British state to bring democracy to Ireland, the world crisis of capitalism dictates the exact opposite. Ireland, in common with other oppressed nations, will have to have less and not more democracy as long as it remains under imperialist control.

Once this point has been grasped by a wider number of those on the left,

the way ahead will be cleared for building a real movement in Britain in support of the struggle in Ireland. But it must be understood that there are no short cuts in this task. There has been a temptation in the past to argue that all that was necessary was to build on the 'disillusionment' with the war that was allegedly growing among the British people as a whole. This is a dangerous argument. Those who are disillusioned will want to see an end to the war. And there are two ways in which wars can be ended. If the survival of British capital depends, as it very well may, on avoiding a defeat in Ireland, we can be sure that it will use any mood of disillusionment that exists to justify a further round of massive repression in the hope of a 'final victory'. This is what the bourgeois press is now clamouring for. In a similar way, those arguments that stress the 'cost of the war' to the British taxpayer do nothing to clarify what is at stake. Such arguments strengthen the hold of chauvinism in the working class and discredit the supporters of immediate withdrawal in the eyes of many left wing people who are confused by the Bill of Rights arguments.

The central task in Britain is to take up the dominant arguments that have prevented in the past and still prevent today the building up of a real movement in solidarity with the Irish struggle. These arguments boil down to the belief that it is possible for imperialism to be turned into its opposite without overthrowing it, that it is possible for the imperialist army to be neutral and that it is possible for the British state to allow democracy in Ireland.

For our part, we in the RCG have made these arguments our main target both in our pamphlet *Ireland — British Labour and British Imperialism* and in our constant propaganda in the labour movement. We welcome all discussion on our approach and on the way forward to building up support in Britain for the struggle of the Irish people.

As the slogans on our banners have read today:

No British Plans for Ireland — Troops Out Now.

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