

The response to Warrington

The public response to the Warrington bombing has been shaped more by the panic about crime than by the conflict in Ireland and shows the changing role of the Irish War in British politics. Our response remains unchanged: we defend the right of the Irish people to take whatever measures are necessary in their struggle for freedom.

Superficially the media response to the IRA bombing of the shopping centre in Warrington last week has been similar to every such incident over the past two decades. The tabloids were frothing at the mouth with anti-Irish invective. 'Put the IRA up against a wall then shoot them', was the *Sun's* front-page demand. The broadsheets, though more restrained, were no less insistent on tough action against Irish suspects. The *Sunday Times* demanded the reintroduction of internment without trial.

But if the form of the response is familiar, the content of the anti-IRA raving is very different. The response to the bombing has taken place in the context of a nation gripped by a panic about crime and violence. The Warrington bombing was seen not as the Irish War come to Britain, but as the Irish dimension of a broader breakdown of moral order and social values.

The tone of the reporting had much in common with the reporting of James Bulger's abduction and murder a few weeks earlier. The general view is that Britain is a society under assault from the forces of evil and moral degeneracy. Every individual is a potential victim, whether of teenage criminals or psychopathic terrorists. The answer in both cases is the same—punishment for the perpetrators of evil and a new code of values to restore society's moral health.

What most angered commentators about Warrington was not so much the bombing itself as the fact that the IRA had killed children. 'IRA war on

our children', was the *Sun's* headline. According to the pundits nothing could demonstrate the IRA's depravity more than the deaths of Jonathan Ball and Tim Parry. Just as the murder of James Bulger in nearby Liverpool demonstrated the wickedness of a society that allowed such acts to happen, so the Warrington killings showed the inhumanity of the IRA.

Of course, there was inevitably an anti-Irish element to the post-Warrington debate. The Irishman who was arrested and had his car blown up by the police after he ran out of petrol on the M25 last week can testify to that. But the anti-Irish sentiment is just one element in a broader mosaic of responses. The reaction to the Warrington bombing was driven not so much by the Irish War as by the climate of fear that now pervades the country.

Much has been made in Britain of the reaction in Ireland to the Warrington bombings. According to commentators in Britain there is a spontaneous move in Ireland for 'peace' and in opposition to the republican movement. In fact much of the response in Ireland has been carefully manipulated.

The main groups organising the peace rallies in Ireland—New Consensus, Families against Intimidation and Terror—are all front organisations for the Workers' Party, the virulently anti-republican product of the degeneration of Official Sinn Féin. These groups have been waiting for the right moment to launch a 'spontaneous' anti-republican campaign—and the Warrington bombing provided an ideal opportunity. Whitehall, the Dublin government ►

and the British press have all seized the chance to promote the idea of an Irish anti-republican movement to put pressure on the nationalists. In the context of the growing influence of the urban middle class in Southern politics (a social milieu that tends to be more anti-republican) and the increasing defensiveness of the republican movement, the British authorities have been able to portray the peace moves as a genuine grassroots opposition to republicanism in Ireland.

The upsurge of Loyalist violence in the Six Counties has given credence to the idea that what we need is 'peace' and respite from the mayhem caused by two bloodthirsty warring factions. It has also given credence to the idea that Britain is a neutral arbiter in the 'Troubles' and that British troops are necessary peace-keepers in the North. In fact there is no comparison between Loyalist and nationalist violence. The IRA is not a sectarian organisation: its struggle is not against Protestants, but against the British presence in Ireland. However tragic the consequences of its actions, its activities are part of a struggle for freedom. Loyalist paramilitaries, on the other hand, are purely sectarian organisations: their aim is to intimidate Catholics and to sustain Protestant privilege in the Six Counties.

Britain, far from being a neutral arbiter, is responsible for the violence in the first place. The cause of the war is Britain's denial of self-determination to the Irish people. Britain has maintained its rule over the Six Counties by gaining Loyalist support through institutionalising Protestant privilege. As recent revelations of collusion between the British Army and Loyalist paramilitaries have shown, Loyalist organisations have always acted as unofficial Crown agents.

The fact that the public response in Britain to IRA bombings has changed does not affect one jot our response to them. Our argument is simple: we support the right of the Irish people to pursue their struggle for freedom in whatever way necessary.

The death of two young boys in Warrington was a tragedy, and will be deeply felt by their family and friends. But such casualties are the inevitable result of war. Nationalist children in the Six Counties have been maimed and killed by Crown forces for more than 20 years. And, compared to, say, the immense civilian suffering caused by British bombers in the Gulf, the IRA's record in avoiding civilian casualties has been remarkable.

However many deaths there are in the Irish War—and whether these are civilian or military—the responsibility for every single one lies with the British authorities. If Britain did not occupy the Six Counties and deny the Irish people their right to self-determination, there would be no war and no casualties. If we want to prevent any more tragedies like the one at Warrington, the solution is simple—get British troops out of Ireland.

We should not confuse our recent criticisms of republican strategy in *the next step* and *Living Marxism* with any lessening of the support we give to the Irish struggle for freedom. We have always disagreed with the political programme and strategy of the republican movement—just as we have disagreed with the programme and strategy of every petit-bourgeois liberation movement across the globe. In the past we elected to mute such criticisms of Sinn Féin and the IRA because we recognised the strength of anti-Irish chauvinism in British politics. In this climate the only consequence of such criticism would have been to strengthen anti-Irish sentiment in this country.

Today, the intensity of such chauvinism is less and we can afford to make our differences more public. However, just as our differences with the ANC do not affect one jot our support for the right of the people of South Africa to pursue their struggle for freedom in whatever way necessary, neither do they in the case of Ireland. The problem for people on both sides of the Irish Sea is the British state, not the IRA.

The Empire Strikes Back

Why we need a new anti-war movement

by Mike Freeman

The RCP's new pamphlet on militarism is out soon and is essential reading for all supporters. To get your copy send £3 plus 50p p&p to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd.

The RCP and you (part2)

In the last issue of *the next step* we published the first part of our survey of supporters' views of the RCP. This is the second and concluding part. All supporters groups should discuss the survey and we hope after Easter to publish a summary of these discussions.

Your branch

We asked whether you thought that your particular branch was different as compared to the rest of the party. About a third thought it was. In some cases the differences were political; for example, a Glasgow supporter pointed out that they had to argue against regionalism. In other cases there were gripes about the way the branch operated; a Manchester supporter complained of routine sales venues.

Those supporters who thought that their branch was doing worse than the national average outnumbered those who thought it was doing better. This is probably a sense of the grass being greener on the other side.

We also asked what your branch could do to raise the profile of the party locally. Forty-one per cent suggested more publicity, either through the existing media or through public party centres. Thirty-seven per cent suggested a variety of activities, such as demonstrations, dayschools and exhibitions. Fourteen per cent thought we could improve our street sales presence. What this section of the survey showed was that supporters need constantly to think about how to improve branch performance—and that supporters' ideas can be crucial in transforming the party in the coming period.

Propaganda

We asked you how *Living Marxism* could be improved. Ten per cent suggested design changes (fewer white spaces, better photos) and twelve per cent wanted a different combination of writers and columnists.

Many wanted to see a greater promotion of the party and its events in *Living Marxism*. A few wanted a mediawatch section (a kind of *Living Marxism* version of *What the Papers Say*). Some requested a bibliography at the end of the heavyweight articles and a number thought that the articles should be better researched. Five supporters thought *Living Marxism* was too repetitive. Again, as with improving branch performance, getting the best out of *Living Marxism* depends upon us having regular feedback from supporters.

We asked how often you read *the next step*. Just over 50 per cent read it every week and another 20 per cent

most weeks. One in five of you read it only irregularly and a small minority (3.2 per cent) never read it.

We also asked how *the next step* could be improved. This turned out to be one of the most interesting sections of the survey. A third of supporters wanted a more proactive relationship to *the next step*: to use the bulletin as a noticeboard for party events, for more discussion on supporters' political ideas and problems and generally more input from supporters.

One of the reasons for publishing this survey is because we want to encourage supporters to use *the next step* in this way. We do not have a ready-made formula for how to do this, but through discussion of the survey results in local branches, we should generate ideas about how to make *the next step* more useful for supporters.

Communication

We asked how communication between members and supporters could be improved. Just under a third wanted more discussion of the party's perspectives and branch priorities. Along similar lines, some suggested joint weekly meetings with members and supporters—a number of branches already organise this kind of forum quite successfully.

Overall the message was for more contact and more discussion in a variety of ways. The key request was that the branch needed to explain to supporters why they were doing what they were doing and what they wanted to get out of it.

One supporter summed this up by saying he wanted to get his branches' weekly objectives on a Sunday night, not just the branch diary. This seems to be a sensible approach. Different branches will have a different way of organising their meetings for supporters. But the important thing is that branch objectives are explained and that there is plenty of opportunity for discussion. Unless this happens, it is clear that the input of supporters will be diminished, as it is difficult to come up with good ideas without a clear understanding of our objectives.

Make sure that the survey results are discussed in your branch and please feedback any problems, ideas or new points.

Perspectives for party work

The party is embarking on an ambitious programme of activities over the coming months, the aim of which is to give a greater public presence to our anti-militarist politics.

In January the party set itself two tasks for the year ahead—to raise the party's profile and to increase our numbers. Since then we have organised a number of major activities which have helped to take us some way towards achieving these perspectives:

● The Selective Silence exhibition

This is a very good example of what we mean by raising our profile. The exhibition has made a good impact in the media at local, national and international levels. It has ensured that *Living Marxism*, and Joan Phillips in particular, is now viewed as an authority on the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. We are now seen as having an important and serious contribution to make on an issue prominent in people's minds. Through the Selective Silence work we have raised our profile by demonstrating our political authority and credibility. This is the kind of work we want to pursue in the coming period.

● Regional debates and dayschools

We have experimented with different kinds of meetings involving outside speakers around a wide range of topics. Through these we have managed to attract eminent speakers and create a good impression on our audience. That said, the main lesson we have learned from these events is that it is difficult to have any real debate with outside speakers these days, as few people have anything coherent to say about the problems facing society. Although such events can be useful as a way of raising our profile, they do not help to clarify the arguments and are an inferior way of getting our political message across. In the main, it is better for us to organise our own events if we want to make a direct impact on a new audience.

● The supporters drive and conference

Since the beginning of February nearly 3000 people have attended our meetings and dayschools nationally. This is an impressive achievement and gives us a new audience for revolutionary politics. We have recruited hundreds of new supporters as a result, although there is still a lot of untapped potential for party growth.

Overall we can be quite pleased with the party's progress so far this year. We have learned that if we set out our stall well we can pull off events and initiatives which we would not have imagined doing in the past. However we have also learned that we can make a still greater impact by setting

our sights higher and extracting everything we can from what we do.

With this in mind the party has worked out a programme of activities between now and August which focuses all party work around the Campaign Against Militarism. The question we want to pose from now on is 'Where will the West strike next?'. From Angola to North Korea, the West is poised to intervene across the globe. By constantly raising the Western threat to the world, we can give substance to our anti-militarist work.

There will be four main strands to our anti-militarist work in the coming period.

● The anti-militarist pamphlet

The party will shortly be publishing a pamphlet on militarism. Called *The Empire Strikes Back*, this will spell out what we mean by anti-militarist politics. The pamphlet should be bought and discussed by all supporters, and then sold to all new people coming around us in order to give them a sense of what we are doing and why.

● Towards 2000

Mobilising for Towards 2000 will be the party's priority between now and July. All supporters should be thinking of how to promote the event, how to bring a new audience to it and to which of their acquaintances they can sell a ticket.

As with the rest of our activities, the main theme of Towards 2000 will be 'Where will the West strike next?' and the plenaries and workshops on the opening weekend will all help to clarify our anti-militarist project.

● August demonstration

This year the August demonstration (on 7 August) will not be an Irish freedom march, but a much broader anti-war demonstration, jointly organised by the Campaign Against Militarism and the IFM. We want to organise this on a much bigger scale than previous demonstrations, including contingents from abroad, and establish it as the anti-militarist event. We are planning an anti-militarist festival with which to end the demonstration.

● Local work

There will be a national speaking tour in May to help to promote our anti-militarist work. In addition branches should be working out good local initiatives to give the Campaign Against Militarism a high profile in their areas.

Supporters groups should discuss the party's perspectives and feed back any ideas or views about our work.

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