

World Peoples' Resistance Movement (Ireland)

First as Tragedy...

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-By WPRM (Ireland)

'The key to carrying out a new democratic revolution is the independent role of the proletariat and its ability, through its Marxist-Leninist party, to establish its hegemony in the revolutionary struggle. Experience has shown again and again that even when a section of the national bourgeoisie joins the revolutionary movement, it will not and cannot lead a new democratic revolution, to say nothing of carrying this revolution through to completion. Similarly, history demonstrates the bankruptcy of an "anti-imperialist front" (or similar "revolutionary front") which is not led by a Marxist-Leninist party, even when such a front or forces within it adopt a "Marxist" (actually pseudo-Marxist) colouration. While such revolutionary formations have led heroic struggles and even delivered powerful blows to the imperialists they have been proven to be ideologically and organisationally incapable of resisting imperialist and bourgeois influences. Even where such forces have seized power they have been incapable of carrying through a thoroughgoing revolutionary transformation of society and end up, sooner or later, being overthrown by the imperialists or themselves becoming a new reactionary ruling power in league with imperialists.'

– Declaration of the RIM

Since the beginning of the first Provisional IRA ceasefire in 1994, the cause of a United Ireland, has gradually withdrawn from view as the revolutionary nationalist forces went into retreat. As defeat was delivered to the supporters of national liberation, with tailor-made

platitudes by the Adams leadership, the republican movement was gradually led down the road of capitulation, cunningly disguised as victory. With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the Provisional Republican movement became aligned to the stated positions of both the British and Irish governments that not until the majority of the *northern population* wished the reunification of the island, should it be acceptable. The debate within the Provisional movement itself was ultimately won behind closed doors by those aligned to Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly, the latter referring to the GFA as being a, ‘contract between political opponents’. As former OC of the Tyrone IRA and hunger striker, Tommy McKearney points out:

‘The Good Friday Agreement flowed logically, almost inevitably, from the decision by Sinn Féin in the late 1980s to negotiate a settlement within the framework of Northern Ireland. I remember the first ceasefire when people were encouraged to drive up and down the Falls claiming some kind of victory, I recalled a point made by Chou En Lai at the Paris negotiations during the Vietnam conflict – you never gain at the conference table what you did not take on the battlefield.’

Having initially succeeded in bringing a large amount of its support base with it into the peace process, Sinn Féin have now replaced the once dominant Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) as the principle voice for the emerging northern Catholic middle class. The grassroots activists that it once retained in respectable numbers have also drifted away in significant numbers over the years, some into the rejectionist military groupings, and others into such breakaway groups as Eirigi.

Symptomatic of the changing make-up of the Provisional movement can be seen by a recent poll which stated, “16 per cent of those surveyed who were Sinn Féin voters said they too would opt for the Province remaining in the UK...” (‘Newsletter’, 8 August 09) This is not surprising as the idea of reunification does tend to be presented in contemporary discourse as the south marching north. Although increasingly integrated into western European imperialism, the Dublin government does not offer its citizens the same benefits as Britain with its secular education systems and NHS. The GFA and indeed the Assembly does not in any way challenge sectarianism, promoting divergent cultural identities and feeding the myth that Orangeism somehow represents all Protestants, both secular and non-religious. Also, in what he refers to as the, ‘demographic time bomb’, the bourgeois nationalist historian, Tim Pat Coogan, presents a solution very much in tune with middle class thought within the 26 counties:

‘For, largely over-looked in the welter of publicity produced by the recent killings, we now have to hand the findings of the Department of Education’s 2008-2009 Schools Census. This confirms statistically something which I have long believed to be the case, based on my own observations and research. Namely that the Catholic school (and university) population was increasing while that of the Protestants was declining. The statistics given by the Department for the current school year are that currently the Catholics number 50.9 per cent, Protestants 40.7 per cent and the accompanying graphs illustrate clearly that Catholic gains and Protestant decline are an accelerating trends... A Catholic majority therefore is not a Six County electoral mirage. It is a clearly visible prospect on the political horizon.’

Marx’s observation that history repeats itself, ‘First as tragedy, then as farce’, is demonstrated clearly in the Irish republican struggle within its doctrine of continuity, that is, of ‘a rising in every generation’. Those within the RIRA and CIRA rejected the Good Friday Agreement as the latest in a long line of betrayals from within the movement, as had Cathal Brugha, de Valera and Joe Cahill before them. There is much idealism in this, some republicans being

content to occupy the position of torch bearer for Irish freedom, their ambition not extending towards victory.

It is therefore necessary to analyse such things in class terms, republicanism itself being a bourgeois ideology. As the RIM so accurately points out, when the military struggle fails, an internal settlement is the next step, leading inevitably to an accommodation and collaboration with imperialism. Sinn Féin now echoes those republicans before them in the initial stages of collaboration with imperialism, now referring to the rejectionist republican guerrilla groups as 'criminals'. The groups themselves counter by pointing out, with justification, that they are the real republicans, Sinn Féin having deviated from true republican principles. Among these groups however, there is no serious analysis of what it is that continually goes wrong down through history. There is no ideological clarity and the political organisations are retained as support groups for the military organisations. This military centred approach to the imperialist struggle reminds us of Mao's warnings around the necessity of resolving the primary contradiction between party and army. As Mao said, *'Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party'*.

Recent shootings in the north against military and police targets by RIRA and CIRA respectively were directed at the Adams party's influence over the Republican family as much as at the British occupation. Added to this there is the need to remind the British government that opposition still exists to British rule in Ireland, preventing imperialist attempts to 'normalise' its rule there. McGuinness, by branding the RIRA as "traitors to the Irish nation", and Adams, making the historic declaration that in his view the shooting of soldiers is as reprehensible as the shooting of policemen, indicated just how low these former revolutionaries had descended. As former OC of the Belfast Brigade of the IRA and hunger striker, Brendan Hughes sums up,

'What we hammered into each other time after time in jail was that a central part of Brit counter-insurgency strategy was to mould leaderships whom they could deal with. I look at South Africa and I look at the situation here and I see that the only real change has been in appearances... A few Republicans have slotted themselves into comfortable positions and left the rest of us behind. In many ways the Nationalist middle class has been the beneficiary of armed struggle.'

Having successfully integrated the Provisional movement into the state structures of British imperialism in the occupied six counties then, London has secured a Sinn Féin that has entered the new Stormont administration from a position of weakness. Sinn Féin now serves as the junior partner in a DUP dominated government, have consented to supporting the new RUC of the PSNI, and have decommissioned their weapons in spite of, in recent times, having defiantly declared 'Not one ounce, not one bullet' to its concerned support base. In a clear case of 'poacher turned gamekeeper, the British government also sent a delegation to Iraq led by Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness who said, *"I also want to applaud the courage and leadership shown by these Iraqi politicians. I think something very important, something very powerful is beginning to happen."*

British imperialism then has pacified its opposition, recruiting Republicans and ejecting Republicanism. As former OC of the Lower Ormeau Road IRA, Anthony McIntyre said, *'The leadership of the Republican movement historically had always sought a political victory over the British. Now the same leadership, given their present behaviour, is in some ways seeking to become British! The reason that they have been so easily moved is that they were not ideological Republicans, they were strategic Republicans on the basis of anti-British sentiment, which was in turn a result of their experiences in the north. Now they have*

conceded the principle of consent and participate in a partitionist state that volunteers shed blood to destroy'

With the current failure of Republicanism to deliver a united, socialist Ireland, analysis (among Maoists) of the prospects for Maoist growth is the next step. In Ireland, the development of Maoist organisations has been less than inspiring. The Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist-Leninist), before it took the path of Hoxhaism, took a correct line on the national liberation struggle and had an impressive membership. In spite of this the group never lifted a gun. However, it is the activities of BICO that casts the darkest shadow across the Maoist legacy in Ireland.

The Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist-Leninist) originated in the Internationalists in Ireland, a group that was launched in 1965. Renaming itself in 1969 as the Irish Communist Movement (Marxist-Leninist), on 4th July 1970 they relaunched themselves once again as the CPI(ML). The CPI(ML) upheld Mao Zedong Thought from 1970 onward, entire issues of Red Patriot being dedicated to Maoist ideology. The group however, abandoned Mao after the Sino-Albanian split in 1978, after which they upheld the writings of Albanian leader Enver Hoxha, condemning, '*... the Krushchevite revisionists and Soviet social imperialists, or whether from US imperialism's new acolyte, the Chinese Maoist revisionists.*' (Unity and Freedom to the Irish People, 1986)

They were especially hostile to the British and Irish Communist Organisation (BICO), whose promotion of the "Two Nations" theory they regarded as a complete betrayal of Maoism. BICO however not only capitulated to British rule in Ireland, but were almost unique in supporting Ulster Unionism on the island.

BICO emerged within Irish émigré politics in London during the 1960s when a number of Irish emigrants became involved in far left politics. Many of these came together in the pro-Peking Irish Communist Organization in 1965. The ICO correctly viewed Ireland as an oppressed nation, gaining some supporters in Dublin and Belfast. When the events of August 1969 blew up across the north of Ireland, the ICO considered the Loyalist attacks on Catholics in Belfast and elsewhere to be 'fascist' pogroms, the Catholics having the right to military defence.

However, the group took a different direction course when it began arguing that the British Army were playing a progressive role in the north due to their preventing sectarian strife by their presence. In 1971 the group changed its name to BICO. Although Mao asserted that swimming against the tide is a Marxist principle, BICO took this to unscientific extremes. That same year BICO set up Athol Books as its publishing house from which it produced a vast output of publications. Among these were, Communist Comment, The Communist, Northern Star and Workers Weekly. Through these they were to claim that historically Ulster Unionism was more progressive than Irish nationalism, the choice for Ulster Protestants being either the 'secular British state' or the 'reactionary 26 County Catholic State'. This was an argument similar to that which calls for the US to invade Iran as the bringer of secular ideas.

Furthermore, BICO brought up the links between the 1940s IRA and the Nazis, the anti-Semitism of 1930s Sinn Fein leader JJ O'Kelly, the right wing politics of border campaign martyr Sean South and James Connolly's support for Imperial Germany to back their anti-Republican agenda. Because of this agenda, they refused to campaign against internment, arguing that it was justified in the struggle against 'sectarian terrorism'. They also argued that the UVF and UDA were potentially more progressive than any republican group. Such

positions eventually led to their being referred to as the 'Peking Lodge of the Orange Order' and the 'British and Irish Communist Orangemen.'

Arguing that the European Economic Community was to be welcomed, the BICO were equally reactionary on international issues. Not only did Israel have the right to exist but Zionism was also presented as having a democratic potential completely lacking in Arab nationalism, using the familiar arguments that those that opposed Israel were adopting a pro-Islamic fundamentalist and anti-Semitic position.

During the 1990s, BICO's former members set up the Aubane Historical Society, the Workers Weekly becoming the Irish Political Review. Athol Books began to publish nationalist books and by 2006 the Irish Political Review was enthusiastically supporting the new collaborationist Sinn Fein. In line with the mainstream left, Zionism was now opposed and Islamic movements were sympathetically treated.

It was James Connolly himself that first coined the term "Carnival of Reaction" in reference to the proposed British imperialist partition of Ireland. This, he stated, would inevitably lead to the defeat of socialist politics in Ireland and the rise of reactionary Catholicism and reactionary Protestantism on either side of the partition border. This 'Protestants as a nation', idea then was very much one that served the cause of British imperialism, the writings of the BICO-led Workers' Association for the Democratic Settlement of the National Conflict in Ireland, summing up that the line involved full recognition of the Ulster Protestant nation's right to remain in the UK state. It also called for full recognition of the democratic rights of the Catholic minority in the North and the Protestant minority in the South.

According to the BICO pamphlet, *The Two Irish Nations*, 'The one nation dogma creates nationalist division in the working class, since it attempts to impose on the Protestant workers a nationality which they reject. The two-nation theory is the only basis for unity across national lines'. This line of reasoning comes from the same stable as that of the mythical Tibetan independence struggle where imperialist inspired outsiders demand 'Free Tibet' on behalf of others and under the direct influence of imperialism.

BICO used Stalin's definition of a nation to support its claims. Stalin had stated that: '*a nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.... It is only when all these characteristics are present that we have a nation.*' Stalin goes on, '*Common territory does not by itself create a nation. This requires, in addition, an internal economic bond to weld the various parts of the nation into a single whole. There is no such bond between England and America, and so they constitute two different nations. But the Americans themselves would not deserve to be called a nation were not the different parts of America bound together into an economic whole, as a result of division of labour between them, the development of means of communication, and so forth.*'

As a colonised nation, BICO's analysis pointed to the uneven industrial development of the island that had begun in the nineteenth century and had led to a highly industrialized North, the South becoming something of a rural appendage to Britain's economy. The supposed differences in language and the strong influences of different religions on both sections of the island were cited to render the Protestants as a separate nation.

However, the words of the British Army counter-insurgency strategist, General Frank Kitson, in discussing the British Army's function in the north of Ireland points out that: "One commitment will inevitably remain, which is the obligation for maintaining law and order within the United Kingdom... Recent events in Northern Ireland serve as a timely reminder

that this cannot be taken for granted and in the historical context it may be of interest to recall that, when the regular army was first raised in the 17th century, ‘suppression of the Irish’ was coupled with ‘defence of the Protestant religion’ as one of the two main reasons for its existence.”

Lenin however presents a clearer line on the National Question here, when he points out that: *‘if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling legal definitions... but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of independent national states.’*

Naturally, if the Unionists wanted independence from British imperialism, and also the setting up of their own state and if a national democratic movement existed on this basis, pledged to independence and a genuinely democratic state, then no revolutionary could fail to support them. Protestant nationalism however, is not primarily concerned with democracy or indeed any struggle against oppression. Rather it is a force that concerns itself with the preservation of inequalities and with the state institutionalisation of oppression and collaboration with imperialism.

The ‘Two-Nations’ theory in Ireland however has its origins around the end of the 19th century, apparently first appearing in the book *Ulster As It Is* (1896) by the Unionist Thomas MacKnight. This theory was again advocated by the Tory writer W.F. Monypenny in his 1913 book *The Two Irish Nations: an Essay on Home Rule* and was later taken up by the British Conservative politician Andrew Bonar Law.

However, outside the pro-imperialist and unionist ideology, the theory was also promoted in 1907 by the future Sinn Féin Supreme Court judge and Republican TD Arthur Clery in his book *The Idea of a Nation*. Clery’s agenda however appears to have been motivated by his view of Irishness as both Gaelic and Catholic, a viewpoint that would support Connolly’s ‘carnival of reaction’ theory. Both reactionary Protestant and Catholic Two-Nations Theorists, the latter being quite miniscule, cited the religious differences which justified partition of Ireland.

Beginning as an ideological framework for the policy of partition, it was in later times to become the ideology of defeatism influencing many within such revisionist groupings as the Official Republican Movement that had begun pursuing something akin to the Brezhnevite Peaceful Road to Socialism. Becoming an ‘orthodox communist party’ in the Soviet mould, the OIRA and its political wing fell out with the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI), never a supporter of the armed struggle, over its overtly anti-republican line on the north. The Official Republican Movement thenceforward, alienated much of the northern Catholic working class with their position on the armed struggle, the national question and other matters of extreme importance. Contrary to what the Officials argued, the Provisionals were not “a haven for sectarian gunmen” but a genuine expression of nationalist discontent.

Throughout the 70s and 80s, the British media portrayed the ‘problem’ as being that of ‘two tribes’ of nationalists and unionists occupying the same ‘province’ that could not agree or indeed live together without the British Army keeping the two sides apart. The ideology of Irish Republicanism however was not to drive the Protestants out of Ireland, but rather to create a secular, democratic Irish republic.

Internal contradictions within the northern politics allows a lot of shadow boxing between the parties, all of which are a product of British imperialism, Sinn Féin’s pronouncements to its

own supporters as a means to bring them down the path of collaboration provided fertile ground for Unionist manoeuvring. The fact remains however, that the Provisionals disarmed themselves at the demand of a foreign power, becoming an ally of British imperialism and its wars, as in Iraq.

Attempting to present themselves as an alternative, the three main rejectionist republican political organisations are the Irish Republican Socialist Party, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, and Republican Sinn Féin.

First formed in 1974 after splitting from the Official IRA, the Irish Republican Socialist Party and its armed wing, the Irish National Liberation Army had an active and at times fratricidal history. The IRSP paper, the *Starry Plough* however, rejects, “*republican unity*” as “*no other republican group shares our analysis.*” It strongly criticises the continuing attempts by both the Real and Continuity I.R.A.s to rekindle an armed struggle, writing that: “*Those who have engaged in armed struggle have waged an ineffectual sporadic and pointless campaign totally divorced from the reality of everyday life in the North of Ireland.*” On another occasion, an article inside the paper points out that, as the Provisionals were unable to achieve anything approaching victory from their military campaign, and that no group currently has the capacity to even imitate them, it follows that there is nothing to be gained from continuing the ‘armed struggle’. “*The only road forward is the political road. Only be engaging in the everyday struggles of the working class can we make revolutionary republicanism relevant to the class. Come join with us in the only struggle that will make a difference.*” Although the I.N.L.A. went on ceasefire in 1998 and has just decommissioned their weapons, this does not mean that the IRSP supports the assembly at Stormont, clearly viewing physical force at this time as a dead end.

Republican Sinn Féin broke from the Provisionals in 1986 over the issue of abstentionism in the Southern Dail, refusing to recognise the 26 County State. At first RSF’s military ambitions were prevented by the Provisional movement, the Continuity IRA emerging only after the Provisional ceasefire to claim its position as ‘the only legitimate republican organisation’ on the Island. In recent times RSF has suffered a number of splits with some of its’ prisoners leaving the movement.

Emerging in 1997 after another split in the Provisional movement, the Real I.R.A and its political wing, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, contains those republicans that disagreed with the so-called ‘peace process’. The emotive outburst that followed the disastrous Omagh bombing disrupted the Real IRA’s strategy of attempting to wreck the process and bringing the Provisional movement back to the armed struggle. This group has itself undergone a split with some of its prisoners now affiliating to group calling itself the New Republican Forum.

The latest defection from the Provisional movement is that of Éirígí, an organisation that has no military ambitions, seeking to save the socialist legacy of Sinn Féin’s republicanism that has proved to have a good activist base that are very visible in protests and demonstrations.

As something of a historical footnote, the Official Republican Movement (ORM) that had split from Group B (formerly the OIRA) decommissioned its own weapons earlier this year. The OIRA’s arsenal, thought to be second only to the Army of the 26 counties in Ireland however, remains in its arms caches.

The driving forces behind the armed struggle in the 1970s and early 1980s have greatly waned due to widespread perceptions that times have significantly changed. The contradictions have been greatly blunted and current prospects for continuing the struggle are

measured against the violent days of the early 70s. The current generation of armed Republicans are operating very much in a vacuum within the nationalist community, searching for a political alternative to the collaborator politics of Sinn Féin and the SDLP. However, as the Long War strategy was winding down at the end of the 80s, new strategies were sought.

'By the late 1980s a sense of stalemate had descended upon the Republican military campaign. The IRA had attempted to break this stalemate in 1986-1987 by increasing armed activity and developing the nature of the campaign by using larger formations of volunteers, heavy weapons and stepping up the level of operations in rural areas. The aim of this tactical campaign would have been to establish 'liberated zones' in the countryside near the border, and to make large sections of the north ungovernable. Drawing on the strategic logic supplied by, among other things, the Tet offensive in Vietnam, it would have marked a qualitative shift in the nature of the IRA's campaign.' (Republican Voices, 2001)

Commenting on this possible change of strategy however, Brendan Hughes explains, *'The object was to take over villages in key areas, engaging in major operations and arming sympathetic local people. I was totally opposed to it because we would never have got away with it since the movement wasn't strong enough, the IRA wasn't strong enough.'*

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement amid much fanfare and substance-less euphoria ultimately gave the northern statelet credibility within the catholic community and in general that it never had previously. In spite of this, the nuts and bolts of imperialist domination remain. The north continues to be under British rule and the re-named police continue to arrest and harass Republican activists. The contradictions however have not been solved and are set to reappear some time in the future, the settlement itself bringing only containment at this time.