

SPEECH OF MISS EILISH McDERMOTT
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Chairman sir, ladies and gentlemen, as you heard, I am a member of the People's Democracy, and what I'd like to tell you about this morning, is the role which the People's Democracy is now attempting to play in the struggle for civil rights, North and South.

People's Democracy, as you will know, has been active in the struggle for civilrights for more jobs and houses and against toryism, North and South. It believes that its objectives can only be obtained by the ousting of both Tory Governments and the setting up of an Irish Workers Republic. We arrived at this decision after considering three basic factors, all of which occurred post-August this year. The first factor which we considered, was the Protestant backlash and the threat of Orange fascism. The second one considered by us was the use of eight and a half thousand British troops in Northern Ireland. The third factor was the necessity for support for our cause from the South. To start on the first one then, the Protestant back-lash and the threat of Orange fascism, the People's Democracy recognised long ago that an end to discrimination was not enough. Slum and unemployment would remain breeding violence and misery. Our struggle would have to continue ; now it has become very urgent.

1 The Protestant working class have been shielded from some of the worst aspects of economic depression by the system of discrimination. They now see this privileged position, however derisory their privilege is coming to an end. The result has been the growth in Northern Ireland of Orange fascism. This phenomenon is a reality. The pogrom in Belfast on August 14th and 15, and the subsequent campaign of burning and intimidation show the fascist hate. Paisley's rally recently at Stormont which you may or may not have read in the American papers shows at the drop of a hat, Paisley could organise 3,000 people to come to support his cause. He was at that time protesting against the Hunt report because he thought that our beloved B Specials were being taken away from Northern Ireland at long last. This rally showed Paisley's considerable strength. It showed that he was well armed and will be better armed and stronger than the Specials have disbanded. So now the People's Democracy and the Civil Rights Association face a dilemma. To press ahead with purely civil liberty, the demands will lead to more programs and inevitably, to a sectarian response from the Catholics. To drop the campaign now would disillusion and demoralize the people who have been supporting us for so long; not only the people in Northern Ireland but the people throughout the world, the people in America, the people here in this hall. Those who have suffered so much during it, surely it would be less than our duty to them to suddenly say "okay, we've had enough, we can't fight for civil liberties anymore within the Constitution", because the Constitution has at least given us all they can in legislation. Admittedly, this is only promises but that is all we can expect from the Unionists.

The Catholic population would turn to a policy of green sectarianism and random terrorism, again leading to fire, death and destruction which we saw in August. The Protestant workers fear unemployment and having to take their place behind the Catholics with large families in the unemployment queues. They fear this even more if, as they think likely, the border will go. They are moving towards Paisley because he provides the best defense from these dangers. These people will not be wooed by promises that Catholics won't harm 1 them. They will not be wooed by recognizing the Constitution. They will only be won away from Paisleyism by involving them in struggles with their Catholic fellow workers against redundancies, for higher wages and for more houses. They must also be shown that their Unionist leaders are really their exploiters and the British connection is a source of exploitation. All this means launching a campaign for Socialism and supporting workers struggles on day to day issues. But Northern Ireland with its current economic system cannot provide more jobs and houses; it cannot provide higher wages. It is a fringe area of the United Kingdom economy. It's England's back yard. It is experiencing

a run-down of its conditions in the industries. The new industries being established are either only made viable by the massive investment or grants or as subsidiaries of British Companies which will be closed down during periods of squeeze in the British economy. Only large scale public ownership/control of the flow of profit and capital out of the area can end the ^{and} shortage.

However, Northern Ireland is by itself inviable and this strategy will have to be applied over the larger area of Ireland as a whole. Even to attempt such a strategy in Northern Ireland alone would mean subverting the Constitution and creating a Six County Republic. Now I'd like to get on to the question of British troops. You will have read, you will all know by now that in the middle of August, British troops were moved into Derry and a couple of days after that they were moved into Belfast. Since then the numbers of British troops have increased and it is anybody's guess when they are going to go away. When they were there, when they arrived that is to say, they served to diffuse the situation in Belfast and Derry and even now, they provide protection for the threatened Catholic ghettos; but no one except Nationalist Party Leaders and the Catholic Hierarchy, ~~creases of~~ trusting them completely. They have already helped the R.U.C. raid Republican houses and arrested people for putting up P.D. posters. This quite innocuous poster showed a picture of Major James Chichester Clark juggling four balls, and on each ball it said "Mixed Prod, Mixed Prod" and underneath "Do you trust the mad Major". Apparently now, this is an imprisonable offence. The army work in close cooperation with the R.U.C. and the B Specials. Their operations are controlled by a security committee which consists of the army chief, the R.U.C. authorities and the Minister of Home Affairs who is a Unionist. The troops cooperate with the Stormont Regime because they are basically sent here to shore it up, not as the representatives of an impartial outside arbitor. Just at the moment there are some contradictions between the interests of the British Government and the British Companies and firms they represent and the Unionists. In the interests of long term stability Whitehall wants reform here and is trying to push the Unionists. But if the Left and the Civil Rights Movement aren't satisfied with the reforms agreed on by Callaghan and Chichester Clark, no one should doubt that the British troops will be used to enforce bans on meetings and demonstrations, and even to round up the subversive if Britain decides that that was in their interests. The troops here - rather the troops in Northern Ireland are very friendly; they smile at you on the street but we know and we must fully realize that they are merely tools of the British imperialists structure. We must realize that we cannot trust them to any full extent because they are merely men obeying orders and men who might just as easily turn on the people that they are smiling at one day and kill them. This same policy of imperialism was followed by Britain in Korea, Malaya, Aden and Kenya where General Freeland, the general officer commanding also served. The point is that the British troops are here to save British interests and will only protect the threatened people so long as that is what Britain wants. They will also be used any time now or in the future against progressive forces here when they threaten British interests, especially economic interests. Accordingly, the presence of the British troops is a sharp reminder of the reality of the British imperialism in Northern Ireland. This means that the anti-imperialists struggle is still relevant in this area and must be linked with the social and economic struggle. When British troops are in Northern Ireland or are only an hour's flight away in London, the granting of civil rights in Ulster will be at the whim of the Westminster Government. This is intolerable. The struggle for a Socialist Republic brings a second class - sorry the economic class consciousness of the Protestant working class with the anti-imperialist outlook of the Republicans, and we believe that in this way by facing the problem in this way, we can somehow try to be more realistic. We can fully realize and work with the fact that Ireland is not one culture. Ireland is not Irishmen-born and bred, Ireland has two cultures, probably what we would best be able to

recognize or define into groups as the Catholic and the Protestant, the Irish and the English, Scot. But just because a man has only been living in Ireland or his family have only been living in Ireland for 300 years doesn't mean to say to me that he isn't an Irishman.

The third point is on support from the south. During the siege of the Bogside even the people who had wholeheartedly opposed previous intervention by Fianna Fail politicians in Northern affairs, had mixed feelings about Lynch's television speech. It gave, obviously, encouragement to the beleaguered Bogsiders and it may have deterred the Stormont regime and their Whitehall masters from trying to wipe out for good the pocket of resistance in the Bogside. It would be idle to rule out the danger of further pogroms in the North or of concerted assaults by the police and British troops on barricaded areas. In these circumstances, the threat of intervention from the South is a useful deterrent. It is, however, a two-edged weapon. Lynch's speech may also have helped to stir the Unionists to a peak of rage in August and there is no doubt that the actual intervention of the Free State would drive away moderate Unionists into the arms of the Paisleyites. What we want is not by any of our actions, by any of our policies in any way to make the rift between the Catholic working class and the Protestant working class any greater. It is inconceivable that the Eire army could intervene against the wishes of the British Government, given the extent to which British economic interests now control the economy of the south. There is only one way of ensuring that in the south there will be people capable of intervening in the North if pogroms begin again, and capable of doing so without meeting the unqualified hostility of the entire Protestant population. That is, to heighten the struggle against the economic imperialism in the South of Ireland.

Finally, once and for all, breaking the link between the British and American control over the Republic's actions, and to change the tory nature of the State. Most of you will know the most insidious examples of the Tory nature of the State, that is to say, that a Protestant person living in the South of Ireland does not have the right to have a divorce, he does not have the right to use contraceptives, and by Section 44 of the Constitution, the Catholic Church is given a special position in the Republic of Ireland. It is hardly what you would call 'left', it will never be what could be called left.

The only conceivable Southern intervention in a Northern problem which would not plunge the area into an even bloodier civil war than we saw last summer would be an intervention designed to secure a Socialist Republic. Not to submerge the Protestant workers in a state where their standard of living would be lower and where the Catholic Church would have the ruling hand over them. The People's Democracy have already formed links in the South, in Galway, Cork, Dublin and Limerick, and they have found the results there very encouraging.

To conclude then, let me say, that for me and for my comrades in Belfast, socialism is the only thing that makes sense. Why should the people of Belfast put up with the conditions such as those in the ghetto areas of Belfast, and let me tell you, in case you didn't already know that most of Belfast is a ghetto area. In the ghetto areas, 91% of the houses do not have proper water facilities. They are without baths, they are without inside toilets. They are not humanly habitable, yet 91% of the population, Catholic and Protestant, live here. What sort of manner is the Unionist government duping the Protestant population in, that it can actually think that it has privileges in our corrupt state? This is something which we are trying to set out to change, the process will be long, it will be difficult, but we will try our best and if we succeed in any measure at all at least we will have done something, at least we will have progressed.

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have to emigrate to earn their living? Most of the ancestors of the people here, perhaps some of the people here themselves, have had to emigrate because they could not find jobs in Ireland. The situation is growing, no less grave at the moment. The emigration rate is something which I don't have as a statistic, but I know that it isn't going down. Why should the people, North and South, continue to work, feeding out their hard earned money to the European capitalists? To the German industrialist, to the Swiss bankers, why should they do it - the answer is, they shouldn't do it, but they must. This, comrades, is the degrading manner in which the State treats its citizens. This is the degrading manner in which the politicians, the people who are elected by the people to be servants of the people, lord it over them and line their pockets, and the rich grow richer while the poor grow poorer.

No change will be brought about, as you can imagine, under Chichester-Clark and his Orange Tories. No change, I believe, will be brought about by Jack Lynch and his Green Tories. Nothing will change until the people are in control of the means of production, the means of distribution, the sources of wealth, and can share equally as dignified human beings in the profits of their own labour.

I know we're running out of time and we started late, so I'm going to have to stop soon but just let me say that, first of all, if anybody at any time, if we have an opportunity in the afternoon I would like to discuss this and I mean discuss it with the people here who are so interested in the Irish question. I want to get your point of view, I don't want to tell you any more what I think. I want you to tell me what you think of these sort of propositions so that I can bring back your reply to the people in the People's Democracy in Belfast.

Now is the time, though, let us remember, to consider and plan future action. We can't go on putting it on the long finger, it isn't that sort of struggle anymore. It's no longer the sort of struggle that you can play by ear, it's the sort of struggle that you have to sit down and work out and think about and work at. We hope that you will be able to contribute and I know that you have financially contributed enormously during the past months. I know that the people in Ireland are terribly, not terribly grateful to you, but I don't know what they would have done without you.

I quite simply then want to point out to you, as I hope I have, the lines along which the People's Democracy are thinking at the moment. You in the National Association for Irish Justice think about it, consider it, those of you who already have and those of you perhaps are of a different point of view and perhaps an opportunity will arise during the rest of the conference to do something more about it.

I was interested, by the way, just before I go into Brian Heron's remarks about students and he said that it didn't appear that very many students were getting involved in the National Association for Irish Justice struggle in America. Well if there are any students in this hall, let me say to them and say to them also on behalf of the students in Belfast, first of all that we extend our greetings to you and secondly, if you can do in America as much as the students did in Belfast, and I don't mean that in a boastful sense, I just mean it to say that it is possible for young people to do this sort of thing. To take the initiative, perhaps, and I think that all support should be given to students in their own fight, in their fight for civil rights and human dignity in no matter what part of the world they live.

Thank you very much.

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