

Draft Theses on the Irish Revolution

By Gerry Foley

[The following theses were drafted to serve as the basis for a discussion in the United Secretariat on the perspectives of the work of the Fourth International comrades in Ireland. They were discussed with the comrades of the Revolutionary Marxist Group and a number of changes suggested by them were incorporated into the draft, but a full discussion in the United Secretariat, with the participation of the Irish comrades, has not yet been held. The draft theses are not submitted for a vote at the coming world congress. Their publication is intended to help clarify the differences that have arisen within the Fourth International over analysis and interpretation of developments in the Irish struggle. United Secretariat members Abel, Adair, Hans, Juan, Pedro, Stateman and Therese have indicated support for the general line of the theses.]

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I. Ireland's Uniqueness

1. Ireland is at once a colonial country and a disadvantaged fringe of the British capitalist economy.

(a) An explosive contradiction of imperialist-dominated societies, rural underemployment, has been largely solved in Ireland by emigration.

(b) A substantial measure of industrialization and development of the bases of a modern economy, such as electrification and transportation, has occurred in a distorted way as the declining population became more and more integrated into the British economy and as international capitalism took advantage of the relatively lower costs and favorable legislation in a country where the labor force is on roughly the same educational level as in Britain, and which is close to the important European centers.

(c) Substantial income has come into the country from large emigrant communities established in the prosperous centers of the English-speaking world. These include one half of all persons born in Ireland since 1900.

(d) The weak Irish capitalist class shares in the super-profits of imperialism and identifies its interests with the capitalist classes of the imperialist countries, in particular Britain and the United States.

2. The unevenness of capitalist development is compounded by imperialist domination.

(a) The Irish national bourgeoisie has failed to create an independent national economy.

i. The island remains divided into two states, one of which remains under direct imperialist control, cut off from the economic development of the rest of the country and more tightly integrated in a subordinate role into British industry.

(1) Despite its integration into the British market, the North's industrialization has developed on a different basis from industrialization in Britain.

[a] It was based on imported raw materials with correspondingly higher costs.

[b] Industrialization developed within the context of a colonial caste system, in which the dispossessed descendants of the older Celtic and Celticized population formed the mass of unskilled workers and unemployed, and the descendants of the plantation settlers formed the labor aristocracy. As a result both trade-union and labor political activity has been distorted and weakened and the society remained polarized around national differences.

ii. It has failed to break the grip of imperialism on the economy of the formally independent part of the country, and in the period since 1957 in particular imperialist ownership and control has increased, along with a corresponding subservience on the part of the Irish bourgeoisie. The imprint of neocolonialist dependence is deep in the society of the Twenty-Six counties, where the old Unionist community remains substantially unassimilated, recruitment for the British army is still carried on, the influence of the British mass media is expanding, and the old colonial aristocracy retains considerable landed property. Political domination by British imperialism of the 26 counties, although indirect, remains.

iii. In both Irish states there is a sharp unevenness between the center, the Lagan valley in the North and East Leinster in the South, and a sluggish hinterland.

iv. Irish society as a whole remains split by religious-national divisions that have provided a base for direct imperialist control and the maintenance of an unusual degree of clerical dominance and obscurantism.

v. The combined effects of imperialist domination and the subordination to the British economy have produced demographic distortions, reflected most notably in a higher percentage of the economically dependent age groups.

vi. In order to block the movement for national liberation that won a partial victory in 1919-21, harsh repressive legislation has been put in force in both North and South. These repressive laws are also used to suppress protests and industrial actions that have an especially explosive potential in the precarious Irish economy.

3. The following tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution remain to be completed in Ireland:

(a) National unification and independence.

(b) The ending of repression dictated by imperialist interests and maintained in the last analysis by imperialist power.

(c) Elimination of the caste system created and maintained by imperialism.

(d) Secularization of society.

(e) Industrialization of a type that can develop the country and provide employment for an increasing population.

II. Features of the Irish Revolution

1. The new revolutionary rise of the class struggle has begun in Ireland as a fight against imperialism and for national liberation.

(a) The struggle against imperialism has begun as a

fight against the repressive system erected to block national independence; the masses have not, however, been motivated initially by a conscious aspiration for national independence and unity. They are reluctant for several reasons to resume the struggle for national freedom: the prolonged stagnation of the anti-imperialist struggle; the overwhelming power and proximity of the imperialist centers; the meager fruits of formal political independence in the Dublin-ruled area; and the possibility for mitigating the economic problems of the country through emigration to the imperialist countries and secondary development accruing from the country's close association with the imperialist centers. Despite the initial reluctance of the masses and the unevenness of national consciousness, the development of a major political, social, or economic struggle immediately raises the national question as a whole. The development of the struggle in the North has confirmed this once again, upsetting the projections both of the Stalinist reformists and the economist ultralefts, both of whom, basing themselves essentially on the reluctance of the oppressed nationalist community to renew the struggle for national unity and independence, hoped to avoid facing the national question, at least in the first phase of the fight.

2. The national and socialist revolutions in Ireland will be intimately intertwined.

(a) In the present struggle, the spearhead has been the oppressed nationalist community in the North, the group handed over to the most acute repression by the deal between the Irish bourgeoisie and British imperialism that ended the 1919-21 war of independence. Likewise, a major struggle by the working class or any other sector of the exploited masses arising around economic issues in the formally independent part of the country would raise the national question at a very early stage. Because of the weakness and dependence of the Irish economy, the workers and small farmers cannot hope to change their fate without struggling against the dependent position to which the country is condemned politically and economically by the international capitalist system. Furthermore, because of the weakness of the country vis-a-vis imperialism and particularly the weakness of the native bourgeoisie, the only effective way to fight imperialist control is through a deep-going mass mobilization involving the seizure of the key sectors of the economy by the workers and the popular masses.

The most advanced stage of the present struggle, the mass upsurge that followed the massacre of civil-rights marchers in Derry on January 31, 1972, has already marked out the most probable road for the Irish national liberation struggle and socialist revolution. In response to imperialist repression against the section of the Irish people suffering the most severe national oppression, the decisive sections of the Irish working class, whose development has been thwarted in more subtle and opaque ways by imperialism, staged the first general strike in the country since the crucial battle in Dublin in 1913. The working class turned to its natural method of fighting, using its economic power to combat imperialist repression. The same tendency was seen, although in much weaker form, in the protests against the Dublin government's crackdown on the militant nationalists in the fall of 1972.

Given the extent of direct imperialist control of the economy and the weakness of the native bourgeoisie, a mass

struggle against direct and indirect imperialist repression throughout the island will tend, as it gains momentum, to lead in the direction of the workers seizing all the key means of production, transportation, and communication. This is the only way the force can be mustered to combat effectively the overwhelming military, economic, and political power of British imperialism. The task of revolutionary Marxists is to prepare the way for this development, stimulate this dynamic, and impel the masses forward toward consciously reorganizing society on a socialist basis and integrating their struggle into the international revolution against imperialism and capitalism. It is by intervening in this process and helping to lead it that the best militants of the working class will be won and a capable leadership forged.

3. Only a revolutionary leadership of the highest caliber, a mass workers party on the Leninist model, combining the full arsenal of scientific socialism and worldwide revolutionary experience with an intimate and scientific knowledge of Irish society, and especially the working class and exploited sectors, can effectively lead this process to fruition. In a society as complex as the Irish, where the pattern of uneven and combined development is so intricate, and which is interlocked in manifold ways with the most powerful and highly developed imperialist centers, anything less than a Leninist party can only spread confusion and dissipate rather than concentrate the essential revolutionary forces.

4. Only a revolutionary mass mobilization of the decisive sectors of the workers and popular strata can provide the basis for a victorious armed struggle against imperialism and its native allies.

5. The Irish socialist revolution will be intimately intertwined with the struggle against capitalism in the imperialist centers.

6. The support of mass solidarity movements, first of all in Britain, secondly in North America, and also in Western Europe will be very important for the development and success of the Irish revolutionary struggle.

(a) Such support is important in Ireland where a small, economically and demographically weak population is pitted directly against the strongest imperialist centers. But this support is doubly important because of the special place of the Irish people in the imperialist system. Not only do the Irish capitalists benefit from the superprofits of imperialism but the large Irish emigrant populations, despite the persistence of significant national and religious prejudices in the particular case of Great Britain, are deeply integrated into the society of the English-speaking imperialist centers. As a result, among other things, the ideological pressure of imperialism on the Irish people is very great. The existence of substantial movements in the imperialist centers supporting the right of the Irish people for self-determination and challenging the arrogance of the imperialist rulers will greatly stimulate the anti-imperialist struggle of the Irish people. In particular, they will help convince the Irish people that the course of imperialist development that has reduced them to an ever more dependent and marginal position is not inexorable and that it is possible, by fighting against the fate to which the capitalist and imperialist system condemns them, to help win a democratic, and therefore, necessarily, socialist world order in which they would be able to exercise the full freedom of self-determination.

III. Peculiarities of Irish Nationalism

1. The question of nationality is distorted in Ireland. The older Celtic and Celticized population subjected to national oppression by the English conquest have lost most of their original cultural distinctness and for historical reasons, have become identified primarily by their religion, Catholicism. The community that descends from the British settler population, planted as part of a war of extermination against the older inhabitants, is also identified by religion, Protestantism. Thus, the majority of the Catholic community identify to one degree or another with the resistance to the conquest and to the path of imperialist development, while the majority of the Protestant community identify with the conquest and with imperialism. The Catholic, or nationalist community, identify to various degrees with Irish Celtic culture, although the great majority retain little of it. The Protestant, or Unionist community identify with "British culture," favoring union with Great Britain although they differ markedly in their political and social behavior from the rest of the United Kingdom population.

2. The fundamental and continuous strain of Irish nationalism is opposition to the English conquest and refusal to accept the kind of society created by the conquest and maintained by British domination. In the age of imperialism, this tradition has revolutionary socialist implications, as the pioneers of Irish socialism, James Connolly and James Larkin, realized. In today's world, the only way the Irish people can free themselves from the crushing weight of imperialism and national exploitation is through a socialist revolution in alliance with the revolutionary class forces throughout the world that have the power to defeat the capitalists and imperialists in their main centers.

3. The two Irish communities have tended to become more and more alike, but the Protestants' historically privileged position has kept them from joining the struggle of the Catholics. The basis for Protestant separatism, therefore, is reactionary. There can be no right of self-determination for the Protestants as such.

4. For the foreseeable future, the revolutionary dynamic in Ireland will arise primarily from the struggle of the oppressed nationalist community, representing four-fifths of the total population of the island, to achieve its historic national aspirations, independence and unity, freedom from imperialist domination in all spheres of life. This dynamic, which is the dynamic of permanent revolution leading to a socialist revolution, can only be advanced by leading the nationalist population to fight unrelentingly for national liberation. Only the organized power of the working class is capable of carrying this process through to completion.

(a) For more than a century the national-democratic movement has attracted revolutionary-minded elements in the Protestant community to the struggle against the reactionary social system in Ireland. The national struggle, coupled with the struggle around more directly economic issues, has been the motor of all social progress. No advance whatsoever can be made through making any concessions to the proimperialist caste feelings of the Protestants, either by trying to put the national question in the background or by trying to give a "progressive" interpretation to the specifically Protestant tradition, which

is utterly and irredeemably reactionary, and has been so since the abortion of independent capitalist development in the Protestant community almost two centuries ago. Whatever propagandistic usefulness there may be in referring to the Protestant revolutionary ferment exemplified in the revolutions of 1798 and 1803, it is naive and ahistorical to believe that this tradition lives on in the Protestant community or that the long-dead dynamic of Protestant republicanism can be revived. Attempts to downplay "Catholic nationalism" so as not to "alienate the Protestants" only weaken the national liberation struggle of the oppressed community, whose most radical thrust for almost a century has been to consciously and completely reject the society created by the conquest. Such attempts, moreover, cannot attract Protestants who have not broken from their caste identification, since they correctly sense that any challenge to the established order in the economic as well as the political sphere threatens their special position.

Because of the distortion of Irish historical development by the English conquest and imperialist domination, as well as the proximity and interlocking of Ireland with the imperialist center, in the age of imperialism a united, independent capitalist nation cannot be built in Ireland. The possibility for capitalist national development in Ireland was probably ended forever by the failure of the bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1798. Any attempt to prevent the fight for national liberation leading toward a socialist revolution will render that struggle impotent, utopian, and sterile. In the age of imperialism, there is no solution for the contradictions of Irish development, for the dislocation and backwardness of Irish society, but a socialist revolution.

IV. The Present Stage in the Development of a Revolutionary Leadership

1. The Irish nationalist tradition offers a number of favorable conditions for building a revolutionary Marxist party. Opposition to the status quo is deeply rooted in at least a significant minority of the population and this includes placing a high value on willingness to sacrifice for revolutionary ideas no matter how remote their realization may seem. A considerable body of popular experience with various forms of revolutionary action, both positive and negative, is rather widespread, as was shown most notably in the recent struggle by the sophisticated techniques of mass resistance to repression adopted virtually spontaneously by the people of the national ghettos in Derry at the time of the August 1971 internment raids.

2. Because of the difficulties and isolation of the struggle against foreign domination, among other factors, the Irish revolutionary tradition is highly contradictory and contains a number of debilitating weaknesses. For example, the historic identification of the oppressed nationality with Catholicism and the lack of continuous ties between the Irish liberation struggle and other revolutionary and democratic movements throughout the world have inhibited the spread of Marxist ideas among the leadership and ranks of Irish revolutionists. In particular, the contradiction between the conservative ideology of the Irish fighters and their revolutionary aspirations has traditionally been resolved by falling back on terrorism, which also represents

a continuation in some respects of the disorganized, primitive, and local resistance to the conquest and the forms of exploitation it introduced.

(a) The mystique of guerrillaism and military conspiracy has made it possible for generations of nationalist leaders to avoid the basic questions of class and social program.

(b) As a result also of relying on the military conspiratorial technique, the Irish revolutionary movements have failed to undertake the tasks of revolutionary mass organization and action. Instead they have tended to leave the political leadership of mass agitation in the hands of reformists and to engage in desperate military adventures.

3. Another important expression of the political backwardness of the Irish left is a romantic variant of economism. In its crudest form, this approach holds that the only way to radicalize workers is on issues directly affecting them as workers (wages, job conditions, arbitrary plant management, corruption in unions, etc.). It is reflected in a tendency to ignore general political and social issues that affect workers and other strata oppressed by capitalism.

(a) Although this economist approach is the result in part of a search for a more scientific theory than traditional nationalism and populism, in some respects it is actually a step backward, because it leads to disregarding the historical, political, and ideological contradictions of Irish society and Ireland's place in the capitalist world system.

(b) In a society marked by a permanent latent crisis stemming from a suppressed national revolution, and marked, too, by the fact that the prospects of industrialization within the capitalist context lie in still greater subordination to the imperialist economy, the economic approach leads away from revolution and toward reformism. This tendency is illustrated by the way in which the most consistent economic tendencies, such as the Irish Communist Organization and the wing of the Irish Social Democracy represented by Conor Cruise O'Brien and Michael O'Leary, openly support imperialist policy. The policy of the Communist Party is more contradictory, but in the North in particular, where the national question is posed most acutely, it is aimed at subordinating the national struggle to British reformist forces.

(c) In particular, in a society such as the Irish, marked by acute uneven development, economism leads to fragmented activity and away from the concept of a revolutionary party that can concentrate its forces on the weak points in the system as a whole in order to achieve strategic breakthroughs.

4. The first important advance over the "physical force," or terrorist, tradition was the IRA's turn toward mass struggle after the failure of the 1956-62 guerrilla campaign. This orientation was developed to its highest point when the IRA became the organizational backbone of the mass civil-rights movement in Northern Ireland in 1968 and 1969. In order to maintain the movement, the IRA leadership also had to defend it from economist and ultra-left attacks, as well as reformist opposition to militant mass action.

5. The development of the mass-civil-rights movements threw the system of imperialist control in Ireland out of balance and created the crisis that is continuing today.

(a) The civil-rights movement was able to achieve this result for the following reasons.

i. It was a form of organization that could attract mass participation. That is, its actions were formulated in a defensive way. Discipline was applied to avoid giving the police or Protestant extremists any way of justifying attacks on participants in actions.

ii. It formulated demands that in effect pointed to national liberation and social revolution. Such modest demands as "One Man, One Vote," proportional representation, an end to discriminatory practices in public hiring and the allotment of public housing challenged the whole system of caste privilege that the Northern state was created to maintain and on which it rests. In particular, the demand for the repeal of the Special Powers legislation, which empowered the police to arbitrarily arrest and indefinitely intern any person deemed to endanger the security of the state, and for the removal of the ban on open political activity by the militant nationalist groups as well as on displaying nationalist symbols struck at the heart of the counterrevolutionary state erected by British imperialism as a dam against the national revolution, which already in 1920 when the Northern statelet was established, was tending to go over into a socialist revolution.

The civil-rights demands were actually national liberation demands formulated defensively, that is, they did not call for the end of the partition outright but for ending the undemocratic system inherent in the partition of 1920 and the maintenance of direct imperialist control over part of the island. They tapped the resentment at the concrete effects of the partition that was felt by almost all the oppressed nationalist community regardless of their conscious beliefs about the possibility or even the desirability of a united Ireland, or of achieving the other historic objectives of Irish nationalism, such as freedom from imperialist control in all spheres of life. By organizing the masses of the oppressed people to challenge directly the taboos of the caste state, such as the ban on Catholics marching within the walls of Derry, the fortress and symbol of the plantation, the civil-rights leaders touched off a dynamic that raised the intimidated community off its knees and propelled it out of the control of the Catholic middle-class.

At the same time, these defensively formulated national-democratic demands were understandable to the people in the South, who had tended to forget about the oppressed minority in the North, and they were understandable to international public opinion.

The leaders of the civil-rights movement had a reformist conception that led them to accept explicitly the framework of the partition. But large sectors of both the Catholic masses and the Unionist population recognized instinctively that the logic of the civil-rights struggle was to destroy the Northern state. Thus, in spite of the leaders, the movement brought about a revolutionary upheaval.

6. The development of the revolutionary movement in Ireland and of the anti-imperialist struggle in general was set back by the split in the republican movement that occurred in 1969-70.

(a) The reason for the split was the political weakness of the IRA leadership and the pressures of anti-Communism, social conservatism, and traditionalist terrorist conceptions in the Northern nationalist community and among republican supporters in Ireland and the United

States -- not the failure to defend the Catholic ghettos against the pogroms of August 1969.

i. The IRA leadership did not understand the dynamic of the civil-rights struggle. Its thinking was paralyzed by a "stages" schema that envisaged a democratic struggle first that would open up the way for winning the Protestant workers to a program of national unity and independence.

ii. It wrongly analyzed the reasons behind the reactionary attitudes of the Protestants, tending to put the blame on the Catholic exclusiveness of previous nationalist movements and the failure of these movements to appeal to the class interests of the Protestant workers, who were believed to be "radical on a trade-union and social level." It believed that it could win the Protestants over to the struggle for national liberation and socialism in "stages" by first calling for "democracy" within the Six-County content and by projecting militant struggles on purely economic issues, that is, by forgetting about the partition "for the time being" and by trying to redirect the most exploited and disadvantaged workers in the Catholic ghettos away from resuming their uncompleted national liberation struggle, counterposing demands for "democracy" within the Six-County framework and immediate economic improvements to it. The IRA leadership sought to convince the oppressed Catholics that the Protestants were equally exploited by imperialism and that they were their natural allies, in fact that they would not be able to make any substantial gains until they had won the Protestants to their side. It claimed also that the Protestants had the same national aspirations, under their pretense of loyalty to Britain, as the Catholics and that this nationalism would come to the surface if their anti-Catholic fears could be quieted.

iii. As a result of these misconceptions, the IRA leadership and its supporters were not politically prepared for the 1969 pogrom, and the leadership lost more and more support as its perspective of Catholic-Protestant working-class unity appeared increasingly dogmatic and utopian to the masses.

iv. The republican leadership's problems were particularly acute in Belfast where the IRA was traditionally viewed as a neighborhood defense force and was even less political than in the other parts of the country. This was complicated by the fact that the pogroms in Belfast took a murderous form, including the use of heavy-caliber weapons by the Unionist police.

v. The IRA's mystique as the "secret army" of the oppressed nationalist community, a mystique that the leadership continued to cultivate despite its leftward turn, gave the people unrealistic expectations about its military capacity.

7. The Provisional IRA that developed out of the split represented a regression to the "physical force" tradition.

(a) The core of the Provisional IRA was a coalition of apolitical militarists, romantic moralists, and socially conservative old-fashioned republicans. It coalesced around a number of essentially conservative ideas: That political campaigns and mass action were contrary to the needs of military conspiracy and guerrilla warfare and that raising social and political issues conflicted with the basic need of defending the Catholic neighborhoods (including getting financial and logistical support from conservative Irish Americans and elements of the Southern bourgeoisie); that only military activity was revolutionary, political

activity being reformist or disorienting by nature; that any departure from the rigid tenets of traditional republicanism, such as refusing to defend yourself in court trials and refusing to take part in any of the illegitimate parliaments legislating for Ireland, led inevitably to betrayal; that taking up material social issues detracted from the idealistic purity of republicanism; that divisive social issues should be avoided until after the British were driven from the country; that explicit opposition to the partition had always to be in the forefront of any propaganda.

Together with ultraleft adventurers, the core of the new organization included conservative nationalists who wanted (1) an organization that would confine itself to defending the Catholic communities without raising any disagreeable or divisive political questions; (2) an organization that could block the trend of the militant nationalist current toward socialism.

(b) The Provisional split was supported by a section of the Irish ruling class with the conscious aim of blocking the development toward revolutionary mass mobilization in the North and the South and of diverting the anti-imperialist struggle into forms that posed less of a threat to the Dublin government and to capitalism.

(c) The Provisionals developed a strategy for ending the partition based on a concept of Catholic communalism, the historic current that has sought only to enhance the position of the Irish Catholic community within the broad British system, as opposed to the radical nationalist current, whose general aim was to build a nation to replace the old religious communities and to free Ireland completely from British rule and influence. The democratic nationalists saw British imperialism as a whole as the enemy, and Orangism only as part of the system. The Catholic communalists saw the reactionary political, military, and administrative circles in England, in which the old Orange landed aristocracy and the big bourgeoisie wielded substantial influence, as the barrier to an understanding with the London government and the main sections of the British ruling class. Following in the second tradition, the Provisional leadership apparently believed that only the Protestant bourgeoisie and the Orange patronage machine had a vested interest in maintaining the partition. From this they drew the conclusion that imposing political and economic costs on the British government through a campaign of disruptive bombings and terrorist attacks on the occupying soldiers would be sufficient to force imperialism to withdraw its backing of the Unionists and agree to a united Ireland. A section of the Southern bourgeoisie was also prepared to support some terrorism and threat of force in order to strengthen Dublin's hand in negotiating with the British authorities and enable the Free State capitalist class to defend itself more effectively against the pressures of the Northern crisis.

8. The section of the republican movement remaining loyal to the old leadership, now the leaders of the Official republican movement, assumed a sectarian and defensive attitude toward the militant nationalist feelings of the Catholic ghetto dwellers and also to some extent of the Southern masses, that is, toward the revolutionary dynamic of the national liberation struggle.

(a) The Official republicans reacted to the apparent success of the capitalists in manipulating backward republican elements in Belfast -- in encouraging a split by

promising pure militarists and antipolitical and conservative nationalists guns and money if they would confine themselves to a military defense of the Catholic population and avoid socialist ideas and mass action--by developing a sectarian attitude toward the national struggle. They tended more and more to *counterpose* the struggle for national unity, which they stressed meant nothing in and of itself, to the need for a socialist or progressive Ireland based on the unity of Protestant and Catholic workers. They regarded the increasing polarization of the two communities in the North as a setback and strove to "cool things down," to get them back into the proper "stage." As a result they were not able to advance the nationalist dynamic and at every decisive turn they failed to grasp the revolutionary opportunities. Instead they put forward unrealistic "working-class" formulas such as "Trade-Union Defense Groups" which were supposed to maintain the peace between the two communities.

(b) Increasingly the Official republican movement became a magnet for young radicals attracted to Marxism but skeptical of the traditions of the national struggle and of the nationalistic feelings of the Irish people, tending toward either economism or romantic attempts to project a national-liberation struggle in Ireland along the lines of the "third world," e.g., Vietnam or Cuba.

(c) This sectarian trend was reinforced by the pressure of the Provisionals' emotional appeals for terrorist actions against the British, which led the Official leadership to emphasize its socialist ideals and the need for unity with the Protestant workers in order to draw a sharp dividing line between their organization and their rivals. The Official leadership never rejected terrorism but only restricted its use to a certain "stage" or a certain role in "defending" the mass movement. In order to hold their membership back from trying to compete with the Provisionals' terrorist activities, these leaders tended to use exaggerated claims that the Provisionals were alienating the Protestant workers. In this the traditional republican view that the Protestants (at least the popular strata of them) are deluded Irish nationalists, who must be won over to the national liberation movement at any cost, was reinforced by the economist principle of working-class unity at any price, including, if necessary, holding back the struggle of the most oppressed part of the class so as not to "alienate" the labor aristocracy.

8. Because of their misunderstanding and fear of the developing mass struggle against national oppression in the North, the Officials retreated in the face of the rapidly unfolding revolutionary crisis and became enmeshed in centrist contradictions. They were unable to lead the mass movement forward and by trying to confine it within preconceived limits, they seriously weakened its momentum, opening the way for the development of terrorism and the growth of the Provisionals. The increase in terrorism further demobilized the mass movement; in particular it alienated the decisive layers of the Southern population, isolating the Northern nationalists as well as the anti-imperialist fighters in the South.

9. With the decline of the mass movement, the broader militant nationalist current fell in behind the Provisionals, along with the less political and more activist young radicals, as well as ultraleftists and adventurers.

10. Despite the narrowing of their support, the Official republicans maintained their organized following, consoli-

dated and improved their organizational structure, and expanded their propaganda operations. Signs of a muted and contradictory process of political clarification began to develop.

(a) A policy document that stressed unity of the national and social revolution and rejected the concept of limiting the civil-rights struggle to the Six-County framework was passed in the 1972 Official IRA army convention and Sinn Fein *ard fheis* over strong opposition from Stalinist trained and reformist elements.

(b) The Official republican book service began to sell and distribute Trotskyist literature and, in particular the pamphlet *Problems of the Irish Revolution* that criticized the organization's policy and record from a revolutionary Marxist point of view.

11. Despite their political limitations, the Official republicans have led every mass movement over the past two years.

(a) They were the organizing force in the rent and rate strike as well as the organizers of the march of 60,000 in February 1972 in Newry following the Bloody Sunday massacre, the high point so far of the struggle in the North. Only the Official republicans have made serious attempts to organize the masses in the Catholic ghetto to take the initial steps in administering and defending the communities.

(b) The Official republicans failed to meet the challenge of the struggle. They proved unable to take advantage of the June-July 1971 crisis in Northern Ireland to break the political hegemony of the Catholic parliamentarian. When the bourgeois nationalists were forced to leave the Belfast parliament and make a gesture of setting up an alternative regime, the Official republicans did not take advantage of this to force the conservative nationalists to go along with organizing a revolutionary united front of the oppressed population. Instead they denounced as an attempt to "split" the Catholic and Protestant communities by creating a "Catholic parliament." Similar when the Lynch government was thrown off balance and the explosion of anti-imperialist anger touched off by the Bloody Sunday massacre, the Official republicans could not put forward any slogan or perspective to advance the mass movement politically or to effectively expose the game.

12. Although they grew relative to the Officials absolutely as a result of the decline in the mass movement and of a general rise in nationalist feeling that Officials failed to lead, the Provisionals themselves have also been left increasingly isolated by the demobilization of the nationalist community.

(a) The decline of the mass movement has enabled the Dublin government in particular to repress the Provisionals. But all governments involved, including the American, have stepped up their campaign against the Irish revolutionary movement, including the Provisionals.

13. As a result of its isolation and the increasing repression it is suffering from all sides, the Provisional coalition around "the gun" is beginning to come apart. A section of the leadership is trying to develop political formations, a course that raises the question of political program and alliances. At the same time, in the face of solid opposition from all governments and institutions of Irish society, many of the Provisional rank and file are moving toward more consistently and profoundly

revolutionary ideas. In particular, there is a tendency to turn to mass mobilization to fight the repression instead of relying on influence in high places and to insist on this even at the expense of alienating conservative and wealthy contributors.

14. The biggest obstacle to the development of a revolutionary current in the Provisionals is the guerrillaist orientation, reinforced by the Fenian military mystique. As long as the hopes of the organization remain centered on the commando group terrorist campaign in the North, the politicalization process will fail to develop.

(a) Political discussion will be discouraged on the grounds that it is a distraction from the war effort, that it causes disunity and undermines discipline.

(b) Political positions will be avoided that might alienate the conservative Irish-Americans who provide the money for arms.

(c) The Provisional leadership will see no need for a united front against the repression or for any other specific objective in the North or South with forces that do not support the military campaign.

15. The biggest obstacle to the development of a revolutionary socialist tendency in the Officials is the economist trend, which threatens to divert them away from the national-liberation struggle, which has immediate revolutionary potential, and lead them into a left-Social Democratic or frozen centrist position.

V. The Tasks of the Fourth International

1. The Trotskyist movement offers the only theory that can point the way forward to victory, the theory of the permanent revolution. It offers the only revolutionary method for mobilizing the masses, the method exemplified in the Transitional Program, it offers the only body of useful experience in the techniques of revolutionary organization. It offers the only approach capable of unraveling the complex ties of Irish society—historical, dialectical materialism.

2. Part of the task of building a revolutionary party in Ireland is to end the isolation of the Irish revolutionary movement by promoting the widest possible contacts between revolutionists in Ireland and the international left and fostering an international outlook. Of all existing left tendencies, the Fourth International is in the best position to do this.

3. A fundamental task of the international Trotskyist movement, which will help create a favorable climate for the growth of Irish Trotskyism, is organizing an effective movement to demand the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland.

In Britain the possibility exists for building a powerful mass movement in support of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. In North America, there is a potential for developing at least a significant, broad movement in support of the Irish struggle. In order to achieve this:

(a) The slogans of support organizations must make it clear that Britain has no right whatsoever in Ireland.

(b) The slogans of support organizations must make it absolutely clear that British troops cannot play any positive role in solving the problems of the Irish people.

(c) The slogans of movements in defense of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland must be capable of mobilizing forces broad enough to have an impact on general

public opinion and to affect government policy.

i. In Britain and North America such slogans must be primarily democratic, along the lines of calling for the governments involved to let the Irish settle their own problems and to end repression.

ii. Since Northern Ireland is still politically a part of the United Kingdom, the repressive legislation enacted against the Irish nationalist community is a direct threat to the British working class, and the struggle against these laws is an integral part of defending democratic rights of the working class in Britain.

iii. In Britain, a central demand must be for immediate withdrawal of British troops.

iv. The movements in defense of the anti-imperialist struggle must make it clear that the nationalist community in Northern Ireland is fighting a system of caste repression and that the conflict is not, in essence, a religious one. This means supporting the nationalist community unconditionally and exposing the reactionary nature of the caste system.

4. In the continental countries of Western Europe, where there has been no massive Irish immigration and the historical ties are more remote than in the case of the English-speaking states, significant movements can also be built in support of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. This is especially true because of increasingly close trade and political relations among the West European countries.

(a) In Western Europe also solidarity work must be built around democratic slogans in order to mobilize real political and material support for the Irish people and in order to effectively expose the British government.

(b) The movements in defense of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland have an especially important role to play in giving worldwide projection to the Irish struggle by presenting it to the proletarian vanguard as a part of the international struggle against the imperialist system in circles and regions where there has been no knowledge of the history and traditions of the Irish people.

i. An important part of this is translating the literature of revolutionary Irish nationalism and socialism into various languages and disseminating it.

5. In colonial and semicolonial countries as well as in Japan, any interest shown in the Irish struggle and any demonstrations in support of the Irish people will give a significant moral boost to the historically isolated vanguard in Ireland and encourage it to think in international terms. Such actions will also help to expose the British government by clarifying the imperialist character of its domination of Ireland.

6. In the East European workers states and the Soviet Union, the coupling of support for the struggle of the Irish and the struggle of the nationalities oppressed by Stalinism will not only help to clarify the democratic objectives of socialists in respect to small nationalities but help expose the treacherous nature of the Stalinists' nationalist demagoguery in Ireland.

7. The Fourth International can help the nucleus of Irish Trotskyists develop an effective Marxist organization in the following ways:

(a) It offers an international program and perspective.

i. The immediate international context is important in the case of Ireland, where the struggle for national liberation interacts directly with a whole series of countries.

Close collaboration with revolutionary organizations in the English-speaking countries in particular will be an important factor in the ability of the Irish Trotskyists to lay out a convincing perspective for winning the national liberation struggle and the socialist revolution. Moreover, since all the nationalist groups in Ireland are organized throughout the English-speaking countries, such international collaboration among Trotskyists is an important part of building a party that can assume the leadership of the national and social struggle in Ireland.

ii. Marxist analysis of the specifics of Irish society is still in an early stage. Because of the peculiar combined character of this society, many aspects of international revolutionary experience are relevant to this task. This is realized even by the non-Trotskyist left groups in Ireland, which draw on superficial analogies with the workers struggle in Britain, on the one hand, or with the struggles of the colonial countries like Cuba and Vietnam on the other. Through their participation in the Fourth International, however, the Irish Trotskyists can discuss the problems of the Irish revolution with the most conscious revolutionists from every sector of the world and draw directly on a fund of international experience available to no other group in their country. Such international collaboration can be extremely helpful in analyzing the intricacies of Irish society and its place in the capitalist world as well as in helping the Irish Trotskyists to orient themselves in a difficult and complex political situation. Likewise, through the Fourth International, the Irish Trotskyists can take the lead in ending the historic isolation of the Irish national and social struggle and in educating the heroic Irish fighters in the spirit of internationalism. Through the Fourth International they can develop a complete program for the Irish revolution integrated into the program of the world revolution as a whole. In this process, they will make important new contributions to the theoretical and practical arsenal of international Marxism.

iii. Involving the Irish Trotskyists in a fraternal way in the discussions of the international movement will enrich the political life of the Irish group and help them conduct systematic and fruitful political discussions so that they can serve as an example in this regard to Irish radicals moving to the left. At the same time, participation in an international organization will offer the Irish Trotskyists a wide range of concrete experience that can help them set the example for effective united-front work.

(b) The Fourth International must help the Irish Trotskyists develop their press and propaganda apparatus.

VI. The Way Forward for the Struggle in Ireland

1. The fight in Ireland has now entered a defensive phase as a result of the demobilization of the mass movement.

2. Since all the bourgeois institutions in Ireland have embarked on a course of repression, the main objective for the next period is to build a united defense movement throughout the country.

3. Any mass, militant civil-rights action in Ireland will be an anti-imperialist movement in effect. Now that the repression of the militant nationalist movement has ex-

tended to the formally independent part of the country, the fight for civil rights has become the spearhead of the anti-imperialist struggle throughout the island.

(a) This means that the demands of such a movement must in no way recognize the authority of Britain in Ireland. Since the British troops are the agents of repression in Northern Ireland, the demand to withdraw them is a civil-rights demand as well as an anti-imperialist one.

(b) At the same time, in a defensive phase in particular, it is unlikely that the focus of a mass movement can be direct opposition to the border, which is a key element of imperialist political control in Ireland.

(c) The fight against imperialism must start as a struggle against the concrete effects of imperialist political control and the denial of bourgeois-democratic rights. Within the context and dynamic of a mass civil rights struggle it will be possible to show that the fundamental democratic rights denied in the North can only be secured in an all-Ireland context and that the source of the threat to civil liberties in the South in particular lies in imperialist economic control and therefore indirect political control. At the same time it will become apparent that the only effective way the Southern people can defeat British repression is by seizing imperialist property.

However, since political struggle against imperialism in the South is still on a relatively low level, it is important for revolutionists to fight economist attempts to divert the attention of socialist republicans from the issue of repression, which is the concentrated political expression of imperialist control. In particular, it is important to explain that the economic struggle around wages and conditions of work, trade-union rights, housing, etc. cannot be separated from the political struggle against repression of anti-imperialist fighters.

From the start of the present crisis in Ireland, the fight against repression has been the driving force in a dynamic of permanent revolution. The civil-rights movement grew to massive size in the wake of attempts by the government to suppress or intimidate demonstrators. The police and Orange militia pogroms of August 1969 sparked off ghetto rebellions that led to conditions of incipient dual power lasting for many months in some nationalist areas of the North. The internment raids provoked the rent strike, a refusal by ghetto dwellers to pay any money to the state, and often any bills at all, challenging some of the basic prerogatives of capitalism. The massacre of thirteen civil-rights demonstrators by the British army in Derry sparked a general strike in the South.

Thus, from a revolutionary standpoint there is no contradiction between trying to reach the masses through the issues that directly concern them and defending even the most elitist nationalist fighters against imperialist and the pro-imperialist repression of the local ruling classes. In fact these tasks are inseparably linked. Socialists must take the lead, in fact, in defending the politically more backward nationalist fighters, both for the sake of the struggle as a whole and as a means of winning the conservative nationalists away from reliance on their lukewarm bourgeois supporters, since the bourgeois nationalists have shown their unwillingness to participate in a mass, activist campaign against repression.

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