

## **Thesis of the Irish Trotskyists (1943)<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Part I: - The National Question**

The Protestant ascendancy caste, which forms the majority of the population in the six north-eastern counties of Ireland partitioned from the rest of Ireland and ruled by Britain, originated in the successive plantations of disbanded Scottish and English mercenaries from Elizabethan times onwards. These "settlers" occupied the best land and, when modern capitalism arose, most of the decisive industries were owned by Protestant capitalists who ruthlessly practised sectarian discrimination against Catholics; keeping them out of the skilled occupations whenever practicable and, when business was bad, boycotting them from employment altogether.

Bigotry, marriage, economic ties and the need for protection bound the Orange capitalists, along with the bureaucrats of Church and State, to the British, In the years preceding the First World War when the British Liberal Government, dependent on the votes of the Irish Party at Westminster for survival, made clear its intention of granting a moderate measure of Home Rule to Ireland the Ulster Orangemen, led by Sir Edward Carson, made preparations for an armed rebellion to resist the exclusion of Ulster from the United Kingdom. The conspiracy was backed jointly by German Imperialism, preparing for war with England, and by the British Tory Party and the General Staff which engineered a mutiny of officers on Carson's behalf at the Curragh, near Dublin.

Lenin described the Carsonites and the aristocratic Curragh mutineers as men who acted like revolutionaries of the Right. Carsonism has often been spoken of as the first European fascist movement; and certainly the methods and practices of the Carsonite chiefs sound startlingly familiar to-day and reveal how unoriginal was the later fascist technique. The unbridled demagoguery which flowed from their lips thanks to a complete absence of the "gentlemanly" inhibition which cramped the style of their bourgeois liberal opponents (Churchill and Lloyd George excluded); their hero cult, spectacular bluff, penchant for flashy ceremonies; their drilled bands of drunken pogromists; their contempt for parliamentary law and order and their alliance with the High Command show them to have been the authentic forerunners of the future fascist leaders. Nevertheless, socially the movements were quite distinct for the fascist hordes were trained to smash the organisations of the working class whereas the Ulster Volunteers consisted to no small extent of Protestant workers belonging to the trade unions.

Despite the menace of Germany's exports British capitalism was still firmly entrenched within the Empire and strong in the world market; and the Orange working-class, steeped in class collaboration, was loyal to the core. The Orange Order aimed not at a naked class dictatorship but at a Protestant caste domination which, backed by British bayonets, would hold at bay the spectre of Irish Nationalism and the loss of profits and bureaucratic perquisites that would be the consequence of its triumph.

The British Tories, on the other hand, were motivated to incite the Carsonites and seduce the Army officers by their panic before the wave of militant syndicalism which swept across Britain in the first years of George V's reign; and they were prepared even to establish an open military dictatorship in order to shatter it. However, the first World War intervened before the class struggle in England reached culmination point; and, in the years which followed, the superannuated Liberal Party shrunk into the sidelines while the function of serving bourgeois democracy like a piece of blotting-paper, absorbing and drying up working-class militancy, was much more efficiently performed by the Labour leaders. Feeling safer for the time being, the Tories resumed the mask of parliamentary legality.

## **Vested Interests and the Border**

The foregoing is important not merely as an historical background, showing the initial reasons for Britain's partition of Ireland. Rather it leads us straight to the heart of the contemporary Irish question explaining why British imperialism's financially unprofitable partnership with Orange reaction has held fast despite years of diplomatic jockeying by Éire statesmen and British liberals. The German guns landed at Larne in 1913 are not forgotten. Britain keeps a friendly clasp on "Ireland's Right Arm" lest it help to grip her by the throat.

Britain, far from deriving super-profits out of her occupation of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland, suffers a considerable financial loss; for, while it is true that there are British businessmen with interests in Ulster, it is also certain that these interests would be completely compensated, and a residue retained, if the British Exchequer were to withdraw its subsidies towards the upkeep of the swollen Orange bureaucracy and the maintenance of social services in Ulster at the British level. Even in wartime, Ulster is a depressed area. Despite the 40,000 skilled workers driven to find work in British war industries there are still 25,000 officially unemployed out of a total population of a million and a quarter. Peacetime unemployment is considerably higher than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Several million pounds sterling is mulcted annually from the English taxpayer for the upkeep of the Orange puppet statelet.

The fact is however, that British overhead expenses in Ulster fall into precisely the same category as do grants to the armed forces, or the police – even when these expenses take the form not of direct outlays on behalf of the colossal Ulster police force, and other sections of the State, but of maintenance of social services and the provisions of orders to Ulster industry during the "normal" depression periods. Britain maintains its garrison in Ulster, not primarily as a means of coercing the Irish people, but to counteract the possibility of a rival imperialism establishing a military bridgehead in the British Isles. The occupation engenders sentiments of revolt, however, and necessitates the preservation of order, i.e. the coercion of the nationalist population. As the example of bourgeois Zionism in Palestine also shows, it is more convenient to rule with the help of Gauleiters with a certain mass basis, than through outright military force alone. It is probably cheaper, and certainly safer politically; especially when it is borne in mind that if Britain dispensed with its subsidies to the Carsonite crew it would have a simultaneous (though far from united) Orange and Nationalist revolt on its hands.

The Orange bosses and bureaucrats, for the most part, need to have their fingers directly dipped in England's economic pie. That is why they are given representation in the Westminster Parliament. At a time when great monopolies largely derive their super-profits by a barely concealed plundering of the Exchequer, and when worthwhile orders come only to those directly in the swim, it is a life and death question for Ulster capitalists to maintain a direct connection with the British state. This is why all De Valera's promises of virtual autonomy for the north within a united Ireland, if only Stormont would agree to sever its direct connection with Britain, have gone unheeded. Without state representation at Westminster their industries would die, for out of sight is out of mind. If Britain sacrificed them in a deal with DeValera they would look for a new imperialist paymaster. Orange "loyalty" has its world market price.

## **Éire and the Border**

As her neutrality in the war underscores, Éire is de facto a sovereign Irish Republic, notwithstanding the slim pretence of British Dominion status kept up by Westminster. British liberalism bought out the absentee landlord class (with the Irish peasants' own money to be sure!) to stave off a revolutionary seizure of the land. The Easter Week rising and the Anglo-Irish war brought an end to the foreign occupation of the South. Under the De Valera regime fiscal autonomy has enabled a host of petty manufacturing industries to struggle into being. Saddled with exorbitant interest rates on capital borrowed from British investors, and dependent on British monopolies for all primary materials, costs have been excessively high; and the dwindling, impoverished population cannot

provide a market sufficient to absorb at a profitable level the output of labour-saving machinery in use elsewhere. Already the pathetic "industrialisation" period, begun only a few years ago, is at a close.

A chronic unfavourable balance of trade, rapidly dwindling foreign assets, a falling birthrate, mass unemployment and wholesale immigration to England revealed that the incurable maladies of world capitalist economy were eating at the vitals of the new sovereign statelet of Éire. The world war has only accentuated this disintegration. Today there are a hundred thousand unemployed within the 26 Counties of Éire; while scores of thousands of others have been forced by unemployment into British war industries or the British armed forces. The export of men, sending home part of the proceeds of their earnings, has come to rival the agricultural export industry in importance.

Irish bourgeois nationalism had already exhausted its mission as a vehicle for the development of the productive forces before any real development took place. International socialism alone can ensure a fresh upswing in production for Ireland; and it is precisely for this reason that the one uncompleted task of the bourgeois revolution, national unification, can only be solved by the proletarian revolution. The inclusion of the six Ulster counties within the framework of the national state would only hasten the decline of the already stagnant heavy industries of the north without furthering the development of southern industry to any appreciable degree. National unification under the capitalist system, by plunging the hostile protestant [*sic*] proletariat of the Northern industries into permanent unemployment, would either lead straight to the victory of the social revolution or to fascism. There could be no middle way. It is easy, therefore, to understand why the Éire bourgeoisie, who will have to face a revolutionary situation at home when the workers employed in the British war effort are thrown in the scrapheap, must dread the social consequences of the ending of partition.

Against that dread, however, must be set the fear of a new imperialist oppression. Britain needs Northern Ireland, and would like to occupy the whole of Ireland, because of its naval bases and general military importance to her. The Éire bourgeoisie, for its part, is acutely aware of the danger threatening it from the British bastion in the north, and the campaign of the British Press for the Éire Ports must have thrown them into a cold sweat. For in the epoch of the industrial revolution England used her political control to stifle Irish industries at birth and in the period of the declining world market, when every little counts, it is quite natural to assume that Britain would make use of a military reoccupation in the interests of her own manufacturers. She would break down the agricultural export price level and crush the small-scale urban industries, the fruits of tariff autonomy, out of existence. Or so the Irish bourgeoisie fears. Primarily, then, it is not as a means of acquiring new vested interests, but of better protecting the existing ones against imperialist encroachment, that the Éire bourgeoisie crusades against the Northern occupation.

However, the anti-partition campaign cannot be viewed in the simple light of a struggle for improved military positions for the Éire Army, Certainly that has some importance. But not even a genuine believer in the superior qualities of the "Celtic warrior breed" could doubt the outcome of a full-scale Anglo-Irish war, even if the British were deprived at the onset of the advantage of their base in the North.

Like the ruling classes everywhere, the Irish bourgeoisie's patriotism is inseparable from its property interests. Partition is a crime crying to heaven for redress because their imperialist enemy is at the gate. Partition is a virtue because it keeps the working class - the supreme enemy - divided. That is why class-conscious workers have always reacted to bourgeois anti-partition oratory with a healthy scepticism. Nevertheless the anti-partition campaign is something more than platform tub-thumping, although something less than a constructive aim. As a matter of fact it is the common property of almost all political parties in Éire. It is the national ideology - the class-collaboration cement of a recently oppressed people.

At times in the recent past the nationalist fervour of the common people of Ireland must have seemed dim, or dead, not only to the casual observer but to the workers themselves. But it only lay dormant, ready to blaze into life again. For the famous patriotism of the Irish people is something more than a traditional hangover, or a state of mind induced by bourgeois propaganda. It is an emotion of revolt, engendered by centuries of national degradation, kept alive by the knowledge that yesterday's powerful imperialist oppressor still occupies a part of the national territory and may yet again lay a claim to the South of Ireland.

When Tom Williams<sup>2</sup> was hanged by the Stormont regime last year, flags were flown at half mast throughout Éire, the shops of the main Dublin thoroughfares closed as a mark of respect and protest rallies, organised by the Reprieve Committee, were held throughout the country. The threat to conscript Ulster in 1941 created a crisis in Éire overnight and a wave of anti-British sentiment swept over the Southern workers. The workers' patriotism is their pride in their age-old fight against imperialism. This is an ennobling sentiment, notwithstanding the poisonous bourgeois chauvinism mixed into it by the capitalist politicians and their reformist and Stalinist hangers-on who at all times seek to manipulate the freedom-loving aspirations of the workers for their own reactionary ends.

The rich ranchers and the rentiers are pro-British. The small farmers and the basic section of the bourgeoisie which is interested in production and trade for the domestic market look to England with strong forebodings. Britain is still a bourgeois democracy and it is not so easy just yet to get down to seizing the Éire ports; for, besides the huge numbers of Irish in British industry and the Army, the English workers in uniform would not go willingly into an aggression against the "almost English" people of Éire.

But in a short space of years either the social revolution will have triumphed in Britain or a fascist dictatorship will have come to power. The English socialist revolution would almost certainly be the world's end for the Éire bourgeoisie. But a fascist England would have only less catastrophic consequences. For fascism would ensure a new lease of life, on a lower level, for British capitalism and, in the struggle for dwindling markets, the red clouds of a new Imperialist war would gather over the Atlantic, and the need of fortifying Ireland would imperatively present itself to the English bourgeoisie.

To sidetrack the class struggle by focussing attention on the external danger and thus, at the same time, to keep the masses in a state of patriotic readiness to resist aggression: to preserve green the memory of England's crimes against Ireland in the minds of foreign publicists, especially Yankee, so that Britain's imperialist rival may never be embarrassed by the lack of a sufficiently altruistic, democratic motive to justify its intervention' should the need for stretching its "protective" wings across the Irish Sea present itself. Therein lies the threefold significance of the Éire bourgeois crusade against Partition.

### **Catholic Church's Mass Basis**

If Ireland has hitherto proved to be the most impregnable of all the Vatican's citadels, this is not due to accident. During centuries of national degradation the social classes were mixed into a common Catholic cement by the British, who persecuted the native Irish ostensibly on account of their Catholicism. Moreover, their Catholic faith helped generations of pariahs to keep their heads erect by imbuing them with a sense of being superior in the sight of Heaven to the semi-atheist [*sic*] English. Sentiment against the foreign imperialists was always uppermost and the masses encased themselves in the rituals and doctrines of the mother Church as in a suit of armour in lieu of more material means of defence. Catholic fanaticism the more easily become synonymous with the spirit of outraged nationality because, unlike in other countries, the Irish priesthood never directly functioned as an exploiter.

For 700 years Ireland was a colony. Against this, for barely two decades an uncertain independence has lasted for the South; and, during this time, the fledging Éire statelet has been sedulously

inculcating a psychology of national exclusiveness among the masses by fostering all those ideological distinctions and cultured pursuits which set the Irish apart from the neighbouring English nationality. It is well to remember in this connection that in its long-drawn-out trade war with Britain the Fianna Fáil government received the backing not only of the bourgeois and peasant interests involved, but also of the majority of the workers. So long as imperialism remains intact in the North and a serious threat to the South, and until the workers find a revolutionary socialist leadership, we will have to reckon with the power and prestige of the priesthood.

In Northern Ireland the pogrom atmosphere of the "troubled times" combined with the policy of sectarian education to bring about the segregation of the workers into Protestant and Catholic districts. It is only necessary to take a cursory glance at the windows to tell the politics of the street. In the proletarian republican quarters there is a mass display of Catholic icons, while in the adjoining Orange areas portraits of their Imperial Majesties are ostentatiously in view. The Queen of England here, the Queen of Heaven there! Christ and his mother hung up at the windows and outside the doors of the workers' houses in the Falls Road area are Irish flags, flaunting their irreconcilable [*sic*] hatred for imperialism.

On the surface the Catholic Church looks unassailable. Yet its coming eclipse can be discerned precisely where the appearance of strength seems greatest. A picture of Christ on the cross pinned to a Falls Road window is a demonstration against the imperialist status quo, but the Church cannot lead the change. The republican workers will throw away their icons as soon as the ideas of socialist internationalism begin to take shape among them.

To expose the treacherous role of the allegedly neutral Christian ideology is an essential part of the struggle to develop a revolutionary consciousness among the workers. However, it is by demonstrating the political line-up of the churches with capitalism, rather than by attacking the Christian ideas in vacuum, that this task can best be performed. Owing to the lack of an Irish Marxist literature scattered advanced workers, standing out in lonely isolation to an environment of religious backwardness, have frequently been closer to the ideas of the Secular Society than to dialectical materialism. Confounding base with superstructure, they have magnified Catholicism into a system revolving on its own axis, independent of capitalism and demanding an equal opposition. Here simple atheism is seen to be no more than an inverted form of the religious attitude, for it can only explain the hold of the church by attributing a power superior to all reasoning to the word. Catholic theology is such a potent poison that those who swallow it rarely recover. It is forgotten, however, that once the whole of Christendom was catholic.

Certainly all our party comrades, as well as the advanced workers generally, must be instructed in the materialist philosophy of which atheism is an integral part. Yet it cannot be doubted that even a good proportion of class-conscious workers will continue to perform nightly genuflections to the God of the priests, if no longer to the priests themselves, for some period even after the proletarian dictatorship has been achieved. Only when the lost traces of the old soil are finally ploughed under will the materialist philosophy grow to full bloom and the old religious nonsense be vanquished for ever.

In the meantime the main enemy to be overcome is the capitalist state. It is natural for an isolated worker, influenced by the formidable experience of an encounter with Catholic fanaticism in the flesh, to feel that nothing can be done until we first "storm heaven", but any political party which tried to make a programme of this idea would be only a part of the petit-bourgeois reformist wing. The League of Militant Atheism, which functioned for a brief spell under Stalinist auspices, only played into the hands of the Catholic Action rabble-rousers while at the same time diverting the vanguard from the essential task of mining capitalism at the base. A League of Militant Atheism could no doubt perform an important pedagogical service in a society based on socialised property, because then superstructural survivals would have become the main object of attack, but it is a

piece of arrant nonsense to make a frontal attack on religious doctrine under the present social circumstances in Ireland.

The cowardly Éire Labour Party, on the other hand, has consistently pursued a shameful policy of appeasement towards the Catholic Church, even going so far as to claim that its programme is in conformity with the Pope's Charter of Labour.

Certainly political Catholicism must be fought. The Church will be a colossal weight on the side of counter-revolution. It is one of the main propaganda tasks of our movement to explain this to the workers. Every insolent interference with the affairs of the labour movement must be combatted. In particular the role of the Vatican in the present European situation must be mercilessly exposed. It would be treason to socialism to keep silent on grounds of expediency.

In every important strike the bourgeois press is forced to drop its spurious neutrality. So likewise, in the hundred-and-one minor sorties leading up to the decisive revolutionary struggle, hunger marches, strikes, during every spate of which the bourgeoisie and its henchmen will take panic and cry "wolf", the role of the clergy will become more and more obvious. Thundering denunciations of plots to burn the chapels, of the impending nationalisation of women, etc., will pour from the pulpits. Naturally we are not naïve enough to believe that this will have no effect on the side of the counter-revolution. It will dispel illusions concerning the neutral role of the Church among large sections of workers, but others will be impressed. The Church will find it easy to incite bands of street-corner Vendéans<sup>3</sup> to break up meetings and wreck the property of the working-class movement. It is even probable that in Éire the church will take the initiative in setting up its own fascist party.

But there is no unbridgeable gulf between the peasant smallholders, the backward city masses and the class-conscious workers. As a matter of fact the unorganised layers of the oppressed, the downtrodden slum-dwellers of town and country, have a burning sense of the injustice of things and the instinct to rebel. They are not dumb and cowed like sheep. If they were, fascism with its gospel of violence and its pseudo-radicalism could not appeal to them. It is reformism, holding out no hope of escape from the drab routine of poverty, that turns the backward masses over to conservatism and clericalism and in a crisis makes them storm-troopers of the reaction. Notwithstanding its tirades against the Stalinist bureaucracy, to which it attributes the original sin of the Bolshevik Revolution, it is precisely thanks to the opportunist politics of Stalin that the Papacy is still a world power despite its notorious role in Spain and elsewhere.

However, the era of Stalinism and reformism is drawing to a close, The great class struggles impending throughout the world will find an echo in the remotest corners of rural Ireland. Certainly reactionary clericalism will still retain a formidable following, but the majority will be won for the revolution.

### **The Orange Basis Amongst the Workers**

Lord Craigavon, the late Premier of Northern Ireland, once described his government as "a Protestant Government for a Protestant People". This remark was not let slip by accident. The inculcation of religious<sup>4</sup> bias is a major task of government. Cabinet ministers have to conscientiously set the tone. The present Prime Minister, Sir Basil Brooke, once declared that he would not have a Catholic about his place.

The Orange demonstration of 12<sup>th</sup> July, which commemorates the routing of the native Irish at the Boyne, has none of the light-hearted tolerance of mere historical pageantry. Rather it is the rollcall of the fanatical dupes of Orangeism, officially backed by the Stormont State to keep alive sectarian hate. On the 12<sup>th</sup> only a spark is needed to kindle the pogroms.

As in the days of the Boyne, conflicting social interests continue to masquerade in the guise of religious bigotry. Protestant clergymen must thank their God for the caste set-up established by the

British which gives them not only an influential voice in state affairs but even big congregations. More than a third of the six-county population is Catholic. In relation to the whole of Ireland the Protestant community is only a small minority. Thus from the Protestant stand-point Irish republicanism is a near and real danger. While the alternatives confronting the Protestant workers seem limited to a choice between fraternising with the nationalist workers in the soup-kitchens of a capitalist Irish republic, or upholding the continuance of the British connection, preference for remaining within the imperial state frontiers is a simple matter of commonsense bread-and-butter politics. In the past it has meant employment for the majority and maintenance for the out-of-work at the cross-Channel rates of unemployment benefit. Stripped of religious trappings the Protestant workers' Orangeism is at basis no different from ordinary social patriotism. It is only cruder and more bellicose because the "foreign" danger is acute and more constant.

The Northern Ireland Labour Party is a political wing of the Protestant ascendancy caste. In a crisis involving the regime itself its leadership would unhesitatingly range itself on the side of the big battalions of the British. However, in the past all the major gains of British reformism have been almost automatically applied to Northern Ireland, paid for out of the subsidies of the imperial exchequer without the intervention of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Thanks to this the Protestant proletariat dispensed with the need for independent labour politics. Prior to the Willowfield bye-election, in 1942<sup>5</sup>, the handful of parliamentary victories won by Labour in twenty years of electioneering were made possible only by the votes of nationalist workers eager to keep out the Unionist candidate. This compelled the Labour Party to veil its Orangeism, to whittle it down even under the leadership of the die-hard Midgley until the time of his own apostasy drew night. An ambiguous stand on the Irish question was fatal to Labour's reputation amongst the Protestant workers who had been badly frightened by the nationalist victory in the South and whose state of nervousness continued when, with the rise of the new IRA, the aftermath of the 1916-22 "troubles" grew into the incipient stages of a second civil war. Fear of republicanism was the basis of the rock-like Unionist majority. The petty improvements advocated by the Northern Ireland Labour Party weighed less than thistledown compared to the danger of losing everything in a bourgeois Irish Republic. The Tories were resolute Orangemen, eager for repressions. The milk-and-water Orangeism of the Labour Party looked like watered-down Fenianism to the panicky Protestants. When there exists no basic difference in the politics of rival political parties the masses will cleave to the more determined, especially in face of an external menace. Armed with a press monopoly and a clear-cut programme of action the Tories easily stampeded the Protestant workers into believing that every victory for the wavering Labourites brought nearer the dangers of the economic anarchy of Republicanism.

However, in addition to solidaridising [*sic*] with the Tories in defence of a joint vested interest in the Border the organised workers have also class interests to defend against these self-same Tories. Even simple trade union politics involves struggles with the bourgeoisie. The mass of organised workers, although prone to betray sectarian bias at a time of genuine danger to the "common" interests, are not so readily duped as to fall for the "republican menace" invoked by the bourgeois press during every strike.

The situation of the unorganised masses is different. Unprotected by a craft monopoly the competition for jobs is fiercer. Furthermore, amongst the poorest workers physical poverty is supplemented by a corresponding low level of culture. It is in the mixed districts of the slums, therefore, that sectarian strife runs highest; and, as we found in the case of Catholicism, so likewise with Orange sectarianism it is the impotence of reformism which throws the unorganised masses into the arms of the reaction. If the present social system is not considered subject to any radical transformation there is nothing left to do but to cling jealously to every pittance of privilege the system yields.

### **Sectarianism a Major Weapon Against the Left**

War conditions have immensely heightened working class political consciousness and a hitherto unknown spirit of solidarity exists, made possible by relatively full employment. The mounting wave of strikes, engendering a revulsion from Tory-Unionism among the Protestant masses for the first time, has resulted in a corresponding abatement of sectarian feeling. A small but growing band of the most advanced workers are already influenced directly by the Fourth International propaganda of the Socialist Appeal<sup>6</sup>. The Stalinist membership has expanded hugely, entirely owing to the fight of the Red Army, and the Labour Party has the support of masses for the first time in its history.

But the great majority of left-swinging workers still stand on the outskirts - naive advocates of "unity", puzzled by and impatient of the antagonisms rending the labour movement because they have not yet accumulated sufficient experience to make programmatic appraisals. However, notwithstanding this inevitable confusion over banners it is clear that a new stage of working-class development has been attained, qualitatively different from the pre-war trade union mentality because it is tending towards a conscious rejection of the capitalist system. It is revolutionary feeling lacking a programme to crystallise around.

The workers are proud of their new-won proletarian solidarity, nevertheless, even now partial retrogressions to the old sectarian psychology are by no means excluded. It is easier to break with political Unionism than with Unionist ideology. The umbilical cord tying the workers to the old sectional interests can only be cut clean through a process of revolutionary surgery. However, the Trotskyist movement is too weak organisationally to undergo any lightening [*sic*] development in the immediate future. Meanwhile the Labour leaders are forced to make radical grimaces to suit the rising militancy of the workers - indeed, more than that, they objectively aid the revolution by their campaign for a majority Labour Government which, by exposing their own programmatic bankruptcy, will pave the way for the victory of the Fourth International. Nevertheless, these are not leaders but bureaucratic empiricists stuffed in the old prejudices which they are thus organically incapable of assisting the workers to overcome.

That the old caste spirit still persists is shown by the stingy, resentful, suspicious attitude of a number of the workers towards the Éire war workers. To our knowledge, apart from the Trotskyists not a single unit of the labour movement - not even a solitary trade union branch - protested against the iniquitous legislation passed by Stormont against the Éire workers who must now renew their permission to reside in Northern Ireland every six months. This Act, which on paper also embraces British residents in Ulster, will it is elementary to deduce be applied exclusively against Éire workers. By mutely condoning this piece of sectarian legislation the labour leaders prove that they are completely lacking in an alternative to the Unionist policy of discrimination.

Only a programme for a united workers' Ireland as an integral part of the Socialist United States of Europe, by opening up an entirely new vista of material well-being and international co-operation, can eradicate this grudging, miserly fear of being swamped out by the Southern workers in the post-war struggle for jobs. However, the reformist leaders are incapable of even programmatically transcending the capitalist system and the national state.

Meanwhile the Stormont rulers, who see in this upsurge of Labour militancy the greatest menace they have yet faced, will fight desperately and cunningly to insert a sectarian wedge into the serried ranks of the workers. The possibility that they will meet with a certain measure of success cannot be gainsaid, especially if the decisive struggle for power is extended for long into the post-war period for, with the coming slump in employment and the maturing of the Anglo-US antagonism, there will be plenty of inflammable material lying ready to be set ablaze by the bigots and sectarian-mongers.<sup>7</sup> Already the counter-offensive is under way. The recent governmental crisis led to the formation of a completely reconstructed Cabinet composed of the most notorious Orange die-hards. One of the first steps taken to revive the spirit of sectarianism was the decision of the Minister of Public Security, the renegade Labour Leader, Midgley, to rescind the ban on the 12th of July procession, which was prohibited at the outbreak of the war.



The Stormont Tories will fight to the death to retain their posts and perquisites. The Labour leaders, competitors for office, are a nuisance to them. The Labour Party is a safety valve diverting the leftward surging masses into the safety zone of reformism, and to that extent it is a blessing. But it is also a menace, for it can be utilised as a recruiting ground and as a cover by the revolutionary cadres. The Stormont C.I.D. has already instituted enquiries into this possibility, for naturally they prefer to strike down the Trotskyists in the open while they are yet small. If the Tory junta is forced to limit itself to verbal attacks on the Labour leadership for the moment this is not on account of its strength but rather through fear of exposing its intrinsic weakness, thereby driving the masses behind the revolutionary banner. Sooner or later events will compel the Stormont junta to strike out on the path of Franco and Hitler, but the time is not yet opportune. Right now its main preoccupation is to keep the Trotskyists small and isolated, stabbing at them surreptitiously through job victimisation, and to weaken the labour movement as a whole by a flanking movement rather than by a frontal attack. Stormont fears the tide of revolutionary labour and likewise stands in mortal dread of a resurgence of militant nationalism. Both the one and the other are inevitable, however. To use the republican danger to smash the menace of the left; to strike at the nationalist population; to fan every trifling incident into a crisis, to hound and stampede the Catholic community until the direct actionists are goaded into terrorist reprisals which Stormont can use to sow distrust and discord among the workers; to divide the ranks of organised labour and to galvanise the backward Orange workers into pogromist activities. This is Stormont's plan of campaign to defeat the challenge of the working class.

### **The Nationalist Workers**

The revolt of the six-county nationalist workers is not occasioned directly by [sic] economic causes. They are neither the drudges nor starvelings of British Imperialism, though certainly the badge of Catholicism exposes them to an undue share of peace-time joblessness owing to the operation of the Special Powers Act and the policy of boycott practised by many employers. Still, the larger part of Catholic unemployment is attributable to the "norman" [sic, "normal"?] impersonal decay of the capitalist system and equally affects the Protestant and British workers. For the rest, the same working conditions and unemployment benefit scales exist for both sections of the workers.

At present the living standards of even the Southern workers depend in the last resort upon the British empire. It is the colonial empire which bolsters up profits, salaries and wages in England, thus permitting the absorption at a relatively high price level of Éire's agricultural export, on which the remainder of the economic structure, rests. Freedom of access to the British market, and state independence, especially in regard to fiscal policy, are the twin needs of the Éire bourgeoisie and, so long as they cannot surmount capitalism, also of the workers. The northern nationalist workers, on the other hand, are as economically dependent upon direct incorporation into the United Kingdom as are the Protestant workers. In the days of self-sufficient peasant tillage the Catholic masses had an economic stake in fighting for an Ireland freed from the British grip on the land. Today, however, when all trades and occupations draw their life blood from the heavy industries which only survive by virtue of Ulster's political unity with Britain, a bourgeois United Ireland, could only bring pauperisation to its most ardent partisans - the northern nationalist workers.

Falls Road nationalism is not a constructive programme for an alternative form of government. The IRA seldom if ever think in terms of production, exchange and distribution, or forms of government. It is their profound hatred for the existing regime which spurs the Republican youth into belligerent action. The whiplash of the Special Powers Acts, the victimisation and indignities meted out by the Stormont State, lie at [the] bottom of the Republican revolt. The Garvey Back-to-Africa movement was fed by similar currents of feeling among the American negro masses. Under these special powers all but the meekest, most ineffectual nationalist organisations have been driven underground or brow-beaten out of existence. Warned by experience of the futility of attempting to build an open organisation to voice their challenge, the Republican youth turn from politics to the philosophy of direct action.

The Tory regime at Stormont is the oldest in Europe - preceding Mussolini's assumption of power it has outlasted the Roman Duce<sup>8</sup>. The main props of its rule are: (a) its mass following amongst the Protestants based on Britain's financial bribes and the spectre of Republicanism; (b) constituency gerrymandering; (c) the Civil Authority (Special Powers) Acts which give almost unlimited power to the colossal array of police.

Ireland was partitioned by the British in such a way as to assure the Tory Unionist Party of a fool-proof majority over its nationalist opponents, Stormont in its turn gerrymandered the [local?] County electoral seats so effectively that the nationalist voters could only obtain a mere fraction of the representation to which their numbers entitle them. In consequence abstention from the vote has become a tradition in many Republican areas, so much so that a Unionist can get into Stormont by mustering the merest handful of Protestant votes.

Only a few of the far-reaching powers vested in the Civil Authority can be listed here:-

- (a) By police proclamation publications may be banned, meetings and demonstrations forbidden and a state of curfew imposed.
- (b) The police hold the right to enter and search premises without a warrant and to confiscate or destroy property.
- (c) Arrest and internment may be ordered on suspicion.
- (d) Habeas corpus is suspended and internees and their relatives may be prevented from either seeing or communicating with one another.
- (e) One of the most sinister clauses relates to the right of the Civil Authority to withhold the right of inquest.

A jailed or interned Republican is automatically disqualified from obtaining his family allowances under the Unemployment Insurance Acts on the grounds that he is not available for work. A former political prisoner or Republican suspect finds it extremely difficult to keep employment owing to the police practice of warning employers against them. An isolated incident may kindly [*sic*, kindle?] with unexpected suddenness into a crisis during the course of which hundreds of suspects are rounded up and scores of families, deprived of a breadwinner, are menaced by the spectres of hunger and debt. This explains why the barometer of parliamentary contests registers such startling overnight changes.

The shooting of a policeman during a gun battle in Easter Week, 1942, led to the imposition of the death penalty on six youths, one of whom was subsequently hanged. In the days immediately preceding the execution anti-Stormont feeling reached fever pitch and insurgence was in the air, even if not on the order of the day. On the eve of the execution the Republican Army caused a statement on its aims and principles to be circulated widely in Protestant neighbourhoods - a rare occurrence which fed the rumours of impending insurrection. Subsequently the authorities claimed to have frustrated a "coming-out" by the timely discovery of an arsenal at Hannahstown, near Belfast. The Republican insurrection - assuming that one was in fact planned - had been effectively aborted, and the IRA was debilitated by the capture of so many of its members. The police struck with an iron hand and the nationalist community as a whole was thrown very much onto the defensive. Cage cars nightly patrolled the nationalist areas, seldom returning to the police barracks without a cargo of suspects. Bombs were flung at the police and, to facilitate the fight against this practice, the authorities imposed a curfew which lasted approximately three months and penalised over fifty thousand workers.

It is instructive to study the fluctuating fortunes of the Labour Party during the crisis and its aftermath. A bye-election to the Stormont Parliament held in the curfewed area ended in a bitter defeat. The pseudo-Republican candidate, Donnelly<sup>9</sup>, gained an easy victory, not on the strength of his own programme - he had none! - but by virtue of the help afforded him by Midgley whose

insulting tirades against the martyred Republican youth proved ruinous to the Labour candidate. Barely three months later, however, the West Belfast bye-election to the Imperial Parliament revealed that the Republican workers had in the interim swung spectacularly to the Labour Party; enabling it, despite an adverse Protestant vote, to gain a seat at Westminster for the first time in history. What had happened to effect this lightning conversion of the nationalist workers? In the first place, Midgley's secession and Beattie's agitation on behalf of the internees had redeemed the tarnished prestige of the [Labour] Party. The other side of the medal was opprobrium towards the charlatan "Republican" party - whose candidate, Corvin<sup>10</sup>, forfeited his deposit in this latter election.

It was a negative, despairing mood which had driven the nationalist workers behind Donnelly. However, the Donnelly movement led neither sideways nor forwards. Its mission was neither to reform nor to overthrow. It held out a reasonable hope neither for today nor for tomorrow. Rejecting work inside the Stormont parliament on the grounds that gerrymandering and British control render the existing parliamentary set-up farcical and likewise hostile towards the IRA's physical force doctrine, the "Republican" Party sits back and curses at life's complications. Consisting of a loose agglomeration of Catholic sectarians, abstentionist nationalist M.Ps. at loggerheads with the official nationalist party, and a few workers momentarily fooled by the Republican label, the Donnellyite movement had begun to die before it even had time to achieve the stability and continuity of a party. An adverse turn in the class struggle may resurrect it in the future, but its spells of popularity can never be more than highly transient.

In supporting Labour the average nationalist worker reasons thus: "Unlike the bourgeois nationalist parties the Labour Party may really come to power. If it stands by its promises it will bring us some freedom from police persecution, and perhaps also improve workshop conditions and build some decent houses." Beyond such modest reforms the Republican workers cannot expect a great deal, from Labour's rule. The regime of Stormont has left them little faith in the possibility of achieving fundamental aims by parliamentary methods. However, even under a reformist Labour regime every concession accruing to the nationalist workers, whether as members of the minority or members of the working-class, will still have to be fought for bitterly in the teeth of capitalist opposition. The fulfilment of a programme of reforms will depend, therefore, not so much upon the Labour Government itself as upon the regroupment of the masses around a revolutionary party which will at once act as a medium for exerting pressure on the vacillating Labour bureaucrats and as a weapon for intimidating and demoralising the reaction.

The Labour Party stands pledged to a programme of civil liberties, but it has no programme for superseding the capitalist state which in Northern Ireland is an Orange, sectarian state. Employers, Unionist politicians and the whole Stormont officialdom have a vested interest in keeping the Catholic areas in a state of incipient revolt. If there were no IRA it would be necessary to invent one and, in fact, the new IRA is their creation - a product of the Special Powers. These embattled interests, which can only perpetuate their rule in a divided Ireland and a disunited Ulster, would resist the introduction of ordinary civil liberties to the last ditch. A Labour regime would not last for ever, or even for very long. Either the proletarian dictatorship or a retrenchment of the reaction along totalitarian lines would succeed it. Either the working class will utilise the greater degree of liberty afforded by a Labour Government to raze the existing state to the ground or the Orange capitalist state will put an end even to the modest liberty of belonging to the reformist Northern Ireland Labour Party.

Meanwhile at the last Labour Party Conference it was resolved that the Party should take the initiative in inaugurating a Northern Ireland Council of Civil Liberties. This is a welcome development from the days of Midgley. The Trotskyist movement has conducted a long campaign for the setting up of such a Council to combat the injustices meted out under the Special Powers Acts. Militants in the Labour Party, and the workers generally, must see to it that this decision is really implemented by the building of a genuine Civil Liberties Council supported by and representative of every section of the Labour movement. Militants in the Éire Labour movement must demand similar measures.

By bringing into the clear light of day the full, unimpeachable facts on every case of arbitrary search, arrest and intimidation; by demanding full facilities for enquiry into every case of alleged police intimidation and brutality; by spreading information regarding the insanitary overcrowded conditions under which political prisoners live; by exposing the farce of the police-influenced Internees' Appeals Tribunal; and, in short, by making a public display of samples of the British "democracy" being daily meted out to hundreds of Ulster citizens, a Civil Liberties Council has a revolutionary role to perform. It can hasten the downfall of the regime. It can set on fire the conscience of the whole community, shaming and shocking even the Protestant petit bourgeoisie into protest.

The fight for civil liberties is an integral and immensely important aspect of the class struggle. It is instructive, therefore, to perceive from this angle how low the Stalinist renegades have sunk in their clownish eagerness to act as sycophants to Tory Unionism. Stalinist policy, as is well known, is to give undivided attention to "democracy's" battle against Hitler. However, the tyranny endured by the Ulster minority is too near at hand and affects too large a number of workers to be passed over in silence. At their recent Congress, therefore, the Stalinists passed a resolution "demanding" an end to sectarian discrimination in the hiring of labour and "insisting" on various other laudable changes in the direction of greater justice for the Catholic workers. However, this was a resolution for the record only. Civil liberties cannot be wrested from the vested interests without the maximum effort of a united proletariat, but complete and unconditional independence from the Orange capitalist state is the prerequisite for proletarian unity. The Stalinists, however, are the most steadfast and unswerving supporters of the Orange Tory Cabinet.

Actually, the Stalinist Party is completely opposed to the extension of civil liberties. Its recipe for ending discrimination against the Catholic workers clearly amounts to this: "Put the Protestant workers in the same boat: abolish civil liberties for them also!" This can clearly be seen from the 13th March 1943 issue of their paper "Unity". In a front page editorial, while whole-heartedly professing agreement on the need for special powers, they permitted themselves to indulge in a light criticism of the sectarian character of the Civil Authority (Special Powers) Acts, and - without forthrightly demanding the abolition of these acts - suggested that the British Emergency Powers Act would be a "fairer weapon in the hands of the Government."

This is equivalent to a demand to abolish hanging in favour of electrocution. It is not the sinister name "Special Powers", or a few embroidery phrases which constitutes the essence of the Civil Authority (Special Powers) Acts but the actual powers of repression vested in the state. The British Emergency Powers, quite as totalitarian in scope, would function equally well as a sectarian weapon in the hands of Stormont for there is nothing of a categorically sectarian nature in the wording of these Acts. It is because hitherto Stormont has used them almost exclusively against the Catholic population that the stamp of sectarianism is attached to them.

### **The Irish Republican Army**

The Russian People's Will Party was the classic exponent of individual terrorism. With bomb and revolver it sought to extirpate the worst Czarist bureaucrats and intimidate the remainder into resignation. In France today the De Gaullites and Stalinists carry out systematically planned assassinations on a considerable scale. With the IRA, however, individual terrorism is not a regular form of struggle. True, armed expropriations are carried out. Persons suspected of giving information are sometimes shot. Republicans tracked down by the police in the ceaseless combing for wanted men, illegal drilling, and arms dumps will sometimes try to shoot their way free. Nevertheless, premeditated assassinations are rare. During the past four years one or two detectives in Eire have fallen victims to planned assassination,<sup>11</sup> while in the North one prison warder has been shot<sup>12</sup> "according to plan" and a number of police were injured by bombs thrown during the curfew crisis. Two Ulster policemen have lost their lives during this period<sup>13</sup>, one at the hands of armed expropriators of doubtful connection.

The IRA adheres to the principle that England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity and seeks to preserve its forces until auspicious conditions mature for striking a blow of genuine military consequence. Even the tragic bombing campaign was directed more against property than against lives, although lives were lost, and it was undertaken not in the naive hope of terrorising the British into a withdrawal from Ireland but mainly to publicise to the world, and the Irish nationalist masses in particular, the Republican declaration of war against Britain. It was the imminence of world war, holding out the possibility of a German victory over England, which led to the spectacular intensification of Republican activities in the spring of 1939. On the outbreak of war the IRA welcomed the Axis as partners in the common struggle, and undoubtedly if England had been struck sufficiently crippling blows the Republicans would have risen.

The IRA and the French Stalinist Party, as it is to-day, have striking points in common. Justifying themselves by the sophistry that the Soviet Union must be defended by all means (excepting revolutionary means!) the Stalinists solidaridise [*sic*] with Churchill and Roosevelt and preach contempt and even hatred towards the German masses. Similarly, in the supposed interests of the fight for national independence the IRA solidaridises [*sic*] with the Axis and instils into its members a contempt for the British workers. Both movements subscribe to the doctrine of a fighting elite. Neither is able to draw the bulk of its following into an active participation in the fight against foreign occupation.<sup>14</sup> For this a programme is necessary – a social programme which the workers will feel it is worth staking anything to achieve and which holds out a genuine hope of commanding the sympathy and, ultimately, the collaboration of the soldiers and workers of the enemy country.

Socialists have frequently fallen into the error of confusing the negative violence of the IRA with revolutionary violence. However, more than the proclamation of abstract republican principles and a recourse to violent methods of struggle against imperialism is required to make the IRA a revolutionary organisation. Revolutionary violence is positive violence, aimed at effecting a progressive transformation at the base of society. Even the frankly terrorist People's Will Party was more deserving of the name revolutionary than the IRA because it aimed at least at achieving a change in Russian agrarian production relations.

Incapable of setting in motion its own nationalist masses around a programme for social liberty the IRA, its sincere idealism notwithstanding, could scarcely rise beyond the role of a saboteur squad engaged in helping one imperialism against another. An IRA rising would strike a demoralising blow at the revolutionists in Germany and occupied Europe by placing the prestige of Ireland's age-long fight for national freedom at the disposal of Goebbels [*sic*]. For although they are certainly not "Hitler's agents" in the crude Stalinist sense of the term the Republicans are by no means sufficiently hostile to fascism, which they do not understand, to make any clear distinction between themselves and the fascists. An Irish rising could have profound revolutionary repercussions among the British workers, but only providing it was a social revolution besides being a fight for national independence. It is only when the workers can clearly see the connection between a struggle taking place abroad and their own domestic class struggle that they can be roused to sympathetic action. A nationalist rising which failed to advance the cause of socialism in Ireland would have only a negligible influence on the British workers, without whose active aid the rebellion would be swiftly crushed under the weight of England's military superiority.

However, the possibility of the IRA forming the state power for a limited period cannot be excluded. This could happen should, for instance, the triumph, or imminent triumph, of the British revolution release the imperialist pressure on Ireland and bring the Orange state to the brink of collapse at a time when the workers are not yet sufficiently prepared for the seizure of power. In combination with Fianna Fáil in the South, the Republicans could affect the state unity of Ireland but the people, reduced to unimaginable pauperisation, would remain as disunited as ever. The regime would be one of crisis, ushering in a new phase of the breakdown and decay of Ireland's economy.

Why do not the rebellious Republican youth seek emancipation through a working-class party? How [to] explain why, twenty-six years after the Bolshevik Revolution<sup>15</sup>, they cling with stubborn faith to such a hopelessly antiquated form of struggle? Because the provocations of the government engender a rebellious spirit which seeks assuagement in belligerent action, runs the most facile explanation. However, while the instinct to rebel against imperialist oppression is aroused with almost the automation of a reflex action the mode of resistance chosen by the oppressed, the methods and aims of their struggle, are by no means [...] determined. These depend upon a multiplicity of conditions, the chief of which is the stage of class-consciousness and political maturity reached by the proletariat, and that in turn is largely determined by the course of the international class struggle.

The reformists and Stalinists querulously chide the Republican workers for remaining captive to a narrow nationalist outlook, for refusing to face up to the larger issues – namely, the war effort to defend “democracy”. These people solemnly assure us that the narrow nationalism of the Republican workers is due to a “narrow nationalist psychology”. Beyond this meaningless tautology they dare not venture lest unwittingly they hint at the true political explanation – the corrupt opportunism of this self-same reformist-Stalinist fraternity. It is the big-power nationalism, the British Imperialist jingoism, of the Labour and so-called communist leaders which repels the Republican workers from the working-class movement and binds them to the tradition of Sinn Féin (Ourselves Alone). They belong to a section of workers who for years have been subjected to systematic persecution by an infamous regime owing its existence to the British Imperialist State; and all this time the British workers, led by corrupt lackeys of imperialism, seemed to be sitting back comfortably, impervious to the plight of the nationalist workers in Northern Ireland. It is only when the “larger” issues begin to have a bearing on the fight to end imperialist tyranny at home that the Republican workers will take cognizance of them.

It may be that only a handful of the active Republicans will be won in the future into the Trotskyist movement. Workers who have devoted the most ardent years of their youth to the task of building an organisation at risk and sacrifice frequently cling to it with blind loyalty long after its legitimate successor has cast an obscuring shadow over it. However, the Republican Army comprises only a fraction of the Republican working class. Outside its ranks stands the class-conscious section of workers who have remained aloof from the Labour Party and the Stalinist Party on account of their connivance with Imperialism while at the same time rejecting the IRA on class grounds. It is chiefly from these workers that the cadres won from the Republican side of the community will be drawn.

“A plague on both your houses” is the dictum of “progressive” philistines but not of revolutionaries. Imperialist and Republican violence cannot be equated as twin evils. British Imperialism is cause; the Republican bombs and revolver shots effect. We denounce the Republican Army tactics, the bombings and the armed expropriations – not to affronted humanity at large, however. but to the Republican workers themselves. It is senseless adventurism, indeed a gangster form of activity just as the philistines, say, except that the perpetrators of these “outrages” are not gangster elements but politicals pursuing a false path to freedom. We are far from being neutrals. The Imperialist state is our enemy also. It is precisely because the IRA is in reality a diversion, useful to that enemy though feared by him, that we strive to undermine it and win its following. We are in favour of defending the Republican victims of imperialism but only in our own way, by our own proletarian methods. We thereby weaken the influence of the IRA by demonstrating to the Republican masses that we are equally resolute and much more effective fighters against imperialism.

### **The Communist Party of Ireland**

Protestant-Republican working-class unity can be forged only on the anvil of the class war. National independence will be won either as a by-product of the Irish and British revolutionary struggles or not at all. Finally, only the victory of socialism on a world scale will end national oppression forever. The Trotskyist movement alone fights under the banner of international socialism and, therefore,

alone of all parties and tendencies represents the true national interests of the Irish people. It alone is implacable in its hostility alike to imperialism and to all forms of capitalist rule; and alone is the enemy of every manifestation of bourgeois ideology within the ranks of the working class. On the other hand, the Communist Party of Ireland - Irish, as it is Communist, in name only - confuses, disorients and increases the disunity of the working class. The Stalinist Party is never permitted to absolve itself from a sense of responsibility towards the capitalist system. This follows from its role as a satellite of the Kremlin bureaucracy.

The Kremlin bureaucracy is fully aware that the social stability of the capitalist countries is a prerequisite for its own plunderous rule over the Soviet working masses. World Revolution constitutes an even greater threat to its vested interests than world imperialism; for while it is possible to hope that the antagonisms dividing the great powers will always drive one of the camps of imperialist predators into seeking an understanding with the Kremlin no hope whatever can be entertained of the revolutionaries making their peace with bureaucratic tyranny. A revolution in any one of the advanced countries would act as an inspiration and a signal to the Soviet masses to break asunder the chains of Stalinism. Thus, under the totalitarian Stalinist regime, the Soviet Union is as deeply involved as any of the capitalist countries in the jugglery of power politics.

It follows, therefore, that either the Stalin regime will be in the camp of British imperialism or working in collaboration with its (Britain's) imperialist enemies; and that the Communist Party of Ireland will be committed either to supporting the British ruling class or to demagogically opposing them. However, opposition to British imperialism does not mean for the Stalinist Party support for an independent proletarian struggle for national and social freedom. It simply means that an alliance with the Orange dictatorship on the essentials of the Tory programme, is replaced by an attempted alliance with the bourgeois nationalist organisations on their programme. One form of 'national united front' takes the place of another. That is all.

The social set-up in Northern Ireland undoubtedly offers the Stalinists admirable scope for the creation on paper of national fronts to suit all purposes. In reality of course either form of the so-called national front is of an equally fictitious nature. This is not to imply that the fiction is without its effects; but these are wholly on the side of sectarian disunity. What happens is this: each fresh turnabout of the Stalinists not only leaves the caste bigotry of the workers unchanged, but actually leads to a strengthening of the bonds of ideology uniting them to the bourgeois politicians belonging to their own particular side of the community. For instance, during the period of the Stalin-Hitler pact the Communist Party's flirtation with the nationalist organisations had the double consequence of sustaining the worst illusions of the Republican proletariat and, at the same time, hopelessly alienating the Protestant workers. The effect of the present line-up with Orange reaction on the Republican workers we have shown elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> Among the Protestants the Stalinist Party has registered formidable gains over the past two years, Membership has probably increased seven or eight-fold. These new recruits consist mainly of worker and petty-bourgeois elements completely new to politics; drawn towards the 'left' out of admiration for the Red Army but, most of them, unemancipated from the old jingoistic mentality. On the other hand the strike breaking role of the Stalinist Party has alienated most of the experienced industrial militants among the Protestants.

In Éire, following upon Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, something happened unprecedented in the record of international Stalinism. The Éire section of the Communist Party, afraid to proclaim openly the new policy foisted upon it by the Kremlin - the ending of Éire neutrality - quietly dissolved itself into the Labour Party. Hitherto, despite its imposing record of treachery, Stalinism has always brazenly tried to justify itself in the eyes of the workers. In this single episode is contained the whole preceding twenty years of Stalinist degeneration; political bankruptcy and its moral spinelessness. The greatness of Bolshevism consisted not merely in its capacity to withstand the material blows of reaction but even more to swim against the current of popular feeling. Stalinism gives a few short grunts and then sinks to the bottom.

## Labour and Midgley

Midgley lorded over the Labour Party when he was its leader. However, this show of autocracy was tolerated only so long as it did not run counter to the fundamental interests of the bureaucracy. Directly, a cleavage arose over a basic question [as] the bureaucracy asserted its supremacy. Midgley, already a Labour member of parliament, aspired after Cabinet honours; which obviously would not be offered to the leader of a party bent upon ousting the Tory unionists from power. Midgley's problem, therefore, was to foist an election truce agreement on the Labour Party in exchange for a place for him in the Cabinet. Naturally, his colleagues in the bureaucracy refused to sacrifice their own parliamentary ambitions on the altar of Midgley's ego. To bring him to heel the Executive resorted to a calculated "provocation". Beattie, representing the "nationalist" wing of the party, was elected parliamentary leader over Midgley's head. The affronted autocrat straightway demanded the revocation of this decision and, failing to achieve this, deserted the party on the excuse that it was capitulating to Republicanism. The bureaucracy tried hard to effect a compromise and finally only expelled him after he had already formed his new organisation, the Commonwealth Labour Party. For, providing he could have been persuaded to accept defeat on the main issue, a chastened Midgley, harnessed alongside Beattie, might have remained an important asset to the Labour Party. His reassuring presence would have helped to counteract the adverse effects in the Orange constituencies of Beattie's overtures to the Republicans, and vice versa. In Northern Ireland the caste division of the workers makes a system of double bookkeeping - always a necessary device of opportunist parties - particularly expedient.

Midgley was the most outspoken reactionary in the Labour Party, but only because he had the opportunity of coming to immediate terms with the reaction. The remainder of the bureaucracy can only climb to power through a Labour Party General Election victory. While it is commendable to resist a temptation no virtue is involved in bowing to necessity. Moreover, while piously denouncing Midgley's entry into the undemocratic Stormont Cabinet these bureaucrats condone the position of the Labour Ministers at Westminster. Yet the crimes of British Imperialism in India, which Bevin and Atlee freely participated in, are already of infinitely greater magnitude than any which could fall within the provincial scope of the Stormont regime.

It is therefore hypocritical, besides being a barren and dilletante pursuit, to indulge in abstract moral comparisons, as is the practice of the self-righteous "loyal" leaders. For our part, while preserving complete independence from the reformist bureaucrats on all questions, we support every aspect of policy and every practical action forced upon them, whether by rank and file pressure or by the pressure of their own ambitions, which adds to the independence of the workers; separating them from the bourgeois parties and heightening their hostility towards them. Therefore, we support the Labour Party demand for a General Election as against the Stalinist-Midgleyite policy of a truce with the Tories. A Labour Party General Election victory will usher in a new and higher phase of the class struggle, subjecting the reformist leaders to the test of practice at a time when immediate socialist measures will have become a matter of life-and-death urgency to the working-class. Reformism's decline in prestige will be matched by a corresponding growth in the influence of the revolutionary party.

On the other hand, we are not in favour of submitting the sectarian Commonwealth Labour Party to any sort of parliamentary test. A party which bases itself upon sectarian disunity aids only the Orange dictatorship and cannot be considered a section of the Labour movement. At present Midgley's party is an auxiliary wing of the Tory Unionist Party. Tomorrow it may well become a fascist organisation. Certainly its predominantly proletarian composition does not exclude this possibility. Directly Midgley began to smell of fascism most of the present members - today drawn towards Midgley by their violent hatred of Catholicism and nationalism - would abandon him. Nonetheless, in a period of prolonged unemployment large numbers of the most backward, prejudice-ridden masses would gather round him. Midgley himself no longer has any real stake in the proletarian organisation. On the other hand, although he is a Cabinet Minister he has not as yet



become assimilated into the Tory-Unionist Party bureaucracy. He remains an irresponsible, unstable element; a free-lance Labour Unionist. It is in this lack of a secure anchorage that the danger of him lies. When the capitalists begin to cast around for a Fuhrer to foist upon the workers Midgley, whom nature and circumstances have endowed with manifold qualifications, will stand high on the list of candidates.

### **Labour and the Orange State**

In contradistinction to a Tory regime a Labour Government cannot enter into a conspiracy with the aggressive forces, of the bourgeois state against the mass organisations of the working class, the Trade Unions and the Labour Party itself, upon which it depends for its own place in politics. No more can it secretly foster fascist movements. However, this is not to say that the Labour leaders in themselves constitute a serious barrier to the counter-revolution, fascist or otherwise. On the contrary, in dealing with fascism they rely implicitly upon the co-operation of the established guardians of-law and order who, being guardians of the bourgeois order, which is threatened by the proletariat, inevitably make common cause with the fascists when a certain stage is reached in the class struggle.

But fascism triumphs only after the proletariat has exhausted itself in unavailing efforts to seize power. However, the bourgeoisie cannot foresee whether in fact there will be an ebbtide of revolutionary hopes or whether on the contrary the deluge will sweep them away. When the swing of the pendulum is violently leftwards and the reformists are losing all control, the bourgeoisie is compelled to attempt to avert disaster, even at the risk of hastening its doom, by unleashing naked military and police terror on the workers. Thus during the British general strike in 1926, Churchill was on the point of issuing firing orders to the army when the capitulation of the treacherous leaders absolved him from the need. During the ascending revolutionary curve the White Conservative reaction is a more immediate danger than fascism.

In Northern Ireland, where there is not as yet even the nucleus of an avowedly fascist movement, the colossal body of regular and auxiliary police – well drilled and equipped with arms, and anti-socialist to the marrow – is a constant menace overhanging the working class. The warning of 1932 cannot be forgotten when the police fired into a peaceful unarmed, unemployed demonstration, causing wounds and death.<sup>17</sup> Far more fundamental causes are today driving the workers towards bitter class struggle. Hence, it would be criminal on the part of those claiming to represent the workers to fail to prepare for the recurrence of similar incidents on a far vaster scale.

It is idle chatter to speak of introducing civil liberties into Northern Ireland without placing the demilitarisation of the police force at the head of the agenda. We demand, therefore, that the Labour Party places to the forefront of its programme for power the withdrawal of the right of R.U.C. members to bear lethal weapons of any description. Furthermore, we demand that it pledges itself, upon coming to power, to disband the state-financed auxiliary police force, the "B" Specials; and demand that the funds at present allotted for the upkeep of this Orange partisan body be used instead for the purpose of arming and training workers' defence guards, under Trade Union control, to resist the threat of fascism or of any force of the reaction which might engineer a coup d'etat.

### **Labour and the Imperial State**

Within limits the class struggle in Northern Ireland has its own internal rhythm of development, which may lag behind or race ahead of the British. However, in the last analysis, the balance of political power existing between the workers and capitalists of Britain exercises a decisive influence in determining the nature of the regime.

A fascist dictatorship in England would inevitably produce its Ulster equivalent. Owing to a previous lag the revolutionary curve might continue to ascend for some time after a British revolutionary situation had dissipated itself; but immediately a basic change set in, directly a fascist regime had installed itself on the other side of the Channel, the Ulster workers would be powerless to avert a

bourgeois dictatorship in one form or another. Similarly, a triumphant socialist revolution in Britain would be followed in quick succession – if not automatically – by the assumption of state power by the Irish proletariat.

A reformist Labour Government at Stormont would be unable to maintain itself for long in the face of an entrenched Tory regime at Westminster; for if, despite its minority position in Parliament, the Tory Party in past years proved sufficiently powerful in the work of sabotage, and resourceful enough in the invention of calumnies, to bring about the untimely downfall of two MacDonald Labour regimes; and if at a later stage, operating through the machinery of the Federation of British Industries, they conspired to close the New Zealand Government's channels of trade - notwithstanding New Zealand's relative independence of Britain as compared to Ulster, it may be accepted without discussion that the British Tory Government would move into action against a Stormont Labour regime with ruthlessness, effrontery and ruinous effect.

The choice confronting the unfortunate labour ministers would be reduced to one of running a risk of provoking a state overturn by the workers should they postpone the introduction of radical social changes or, alternatively, of being crushed in the vice of an economic boycott imposed by the Imperial State should they prove themselves lax in the defence of property rights and the maintenance of order. Caught in the midst of a withering crossfire from three directions – from the workers, the Republicans and the Imperialists – the Labour regime would inevitably succumb to mortal wounds. However, during its brief tenure of office the commands of the imperial dispenser of gold and food would be hearkened to like the voice of God. God, though feared, is not in all things obeyed. The labour reformists could not implement to the full the dictates of their imperialist overlords without, in doing so, eternally disgracing themselves in the eyes of the nationalist population and the working class in general. They would equivocate and temporize, squirming round in a vicious circle of half measures. Confronted with the imperative necessity of taking sides on an issue, certainly the labour lackeys would always choose the bourgeois state. But they would take sides weakly. Therefore, imperialism would not be tempted gratefully to forbear from wrecking their regime; for it would feel the pressing need of restoring a strong, authoritarian government in Ulster. British 'good-will' is not a free commodity on the market. Its price to Ulster is the maintenance of sufficient internal calm to ensure a peaceful occupation.

Assuming that the first phases of a revolutionary situation develop in Ulster before the overthrow of the British Imperialist state has been accomplished by the English workers, the logic of the class struggle will compel the Ulster proletariat to establish control over the key industries and to punish refractory capitalists by outright confiscation – measures which the Imperial state will strive to nullify by a full utilisation of all the coercive means at its disposal. The Northern workers will be able to hold out against the hostile machinations of imperialism, and the internal economic chaos following the rupture with the British capitalist state, only together with the Southern workers within a system of pooling and makeshift planning until the British proletarian dictatorship comes to their aid. Events will accomplish in a remarkably short space of a time the work which centuries have left undone. The tasks of the revolution will weld together the workers and peasants of North and South.

### **The Question of Labour Unity**

Ulster is a bridgehead which must be held against all comers in the unending battles for world trade hegemony. It is one of a chain of fortresses stretching to the ends of the earth to protect the trade routes and the colonial empire of the British bourgeoisie, upon whose prosperity and stability - with only fluctuations enough to ensure the return of strong Labour forces to Parliament - the hopes of the Labour Party bureaucrats recline. If the English social patriots would prove reluctant to yield up Ulster the Six County bureaucrats - equally dependant on the spoils of Empire - would be no less unwilling to accept secession. Therefore a precondition to Irish Labour unity is a break between the workers and the bureaucrats.

It is reported that at the next Annual Conference of the Northern Ireland Labour party a resolution is to be moved in support of a Socialist Ireland. Militants in the Labour Party must propose a complementary resolution demanding a joint conference to discuss the unification of the Éire and Northern Ireland Labour Parties. A united Labour Party of Ireland, freed from the bureaucratic stranglehold, could not take the place of the revolutionary party. It would be slow, unwieldy and encumbered by reformist traditions, but the workers composing it would already have achieved an enormous liberation from the old religious caste mentality. A united labour movement confronting a divided bourgeoisie would strengthen the workers' confidence in their organised might and hasten the struggle for political power.

### **Nationalism and Socialism**

The fundamental tasks of nationalism awaiting the solution of the approaching revolution are: (1) the healing of the sectarian breach; (2) the winning of national independence from British imperialism; and (3) the ending of partition. These form an inseparable trinity. None are realisable as isolated aims in themselves, or possible of attainment except by means of the socialist revolution. Conversely, the socialist movement can turn its back on the problems of nationalism only at the price of prostration before capitalism; for a proletariat divided within itself cannot seize power. National tasks and social tasks are thus inextricably woven together.

The national question is a social question and, moreover, one of the largest magnitude. Hitherto, the prevailing tendency among socialists has been to regard the intrusion of Orange and Nationalist banners into the arena of the class struggle as a complication of an exclusively detrimental nature to the labour movement; as a plague of ideologies, in fact. Most certainly this judgment holds true under all circumstances so far as Orangeism is concerned. On the other hand, the unsolved national question – which is not at all a sectarian issue from the standpoint of the nationalist workers – is not necessarily a brake upon the class struggle but, under favourable circumstances, can act as a dynamo upon it, causing violent accelerations of tempo.

For example, had the Imperialist Government dared to implement its threat of conscription in 1941, the unanimous and unswerving determination of the Catholic working-class community to resist would have acted as a potent moral stimulus on the Protestant workers, whose instinctive opposition to conscription lacked an ideological and organisational point of support. The struggle begun by the Catholic workers, rallied in the first stages behind their traditional watchwords, could have led in the course of events to the creation of a united Catholic-Protestant proletarian movement, waging resistance against imperialism on the programme of an independent Soviet Ireland. The lifelong hatred and irreconcilability [*sic*] of the Republican masses towards imperialism, and its Carsonite marionettes, will harden and energise the ranks of the proletariat in the approaching period of revolution.

Finally, the best fighters for Ireland's independence will always be the Trotskyists; for Trotskyism's conceptions of international solidarity and socialist co-operation alone correspond to the national needs of the Irish people. An isolated proletarian dictatorship, even assuming it were not militarily overthrown, could not in the long run prevent a resurgence of sectarian disunity; for ideology cannot take the place of bread indefinitely. With the prolongation of hunger and poverty the wheels of the revolution would begin to revolve backwards. It is only within a system of world socialist economy that the unity of the Irish people will become indestructible for all time.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For the original, see: *Thesis of Irish Trotskyists*, Wisconsin Historical Society, James P. Cannon Papers, Box 22, Folders 2-7.

<sup>2</sup> IRA volunteer hanged in Crumlin Road Gaol, 2 September 1942.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the Catholic counterrevolutionaries of the Vendée region of France in the period 1793-96.

<sup>4</sup> In the original the word 'sectarian' was struck through and replaced with 'religious'.

<sup>5</sup> The Belfast Willowfield bye-election took place on 3 December 1941, and not 1942 as stated here. Harry Midgely was the surprise winner with 75% of the vote, easily beating the Official Unionist candidate, F.J. Lavery. Belfast Willowfield was a borough constituency comprising part of southern Belfast and was strongly unionist. Midgely stood as an Ulster Unionist candidate in 1949, holding the seat until 1958.

<sup>6</sup> *Socialist Appeal* was the newspaper of the Workers International League in Britain, edited by the Irish-born Trotskyist Gerry Healy.

<sup>7</sup> Almost all Trotskyists during the war believed that a postwar slump and an upsurge in revolutionary sentiment would be inevitable, a confident prediction that is here connected to local Irish politics.

<sup>8</sup> This would seem to indicate that the document was written after the arrest of Mussolini on 25 July 1943.

<sup>9</sup> Eamon Donnelly (1877-1944), Fianna Fáil member who ran as an abstentionist Independent Republican candidate in several Northern Irish elections

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Corvin (1899-1975), Easter Rising veteran who received only 2.9% as an Independent Republican in the bye-election in West Belfast in February 1943

<sup>11</sup> Four Gardaí were killed by the IRA from 1940 to 1942: Patrick McKeown and Richard Hyland (16 Aug 1940); Denis O'Brien (9 Sep 1942); and George Mordaunt (24 Oct 1942).

<sup>12</sup> Prison warder Thomas Walker was killed by the IRA on 6 Feb 1942.

<sup>13</sup> Special Constable James Lyons was killed during an attack on Donegall Pass RUC station on 10 October 1942; RUC constable Patrick M'Carthy was shot dead during an attempted robbery at Ross's Spinning Mill, Odessa Street, Belfast, on 1 Oct 1943.

<sup>14</sup> This suggests the article was written before the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944.

<sup>15</sup> This strengthens the case for date of authorship as late December 1943 / early 1944.

<sup>16</sup> The article being referred to here is presumably lost.

<sup>17</sup> Probably a reference to the Outdoor Relief Riots of 1932, see: Seán Mitchell. *Struggle or Starve: Working-Class Unity in Belfast's 1932 Outdoor Relief Riots* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017)