

Ireland: The Promise of Socialism



**Joe Craig
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A Socialist Democracy Publication

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Afterword

Ireland; The Promise of Socialism

This is a book about socialist ideas. Ideas which can explain present society and in so doing assist in the efforts to change it.

We are under no illusion that, at present, they are widely held or popular ideas. They have been vilified and drowned by prejudice and ignorance. Worst of all they have been distorted and disfigured by social democratic and stalinist movements which have almost robbed them of their fresh and emancipatory ambitions.

But we say almost, because the robbery was not successful, any more than the vilification of the rich and powerful and their academic and media disciples. Despite declarations of a new world order and the death of Socialism and Marxism the rottenness of existing society cannot be hidden.

It cries out for an alternative and socialism is the only alternative.

The original and incorruptible ideas of socialism retain all the force and relevance that inspired the early socialist movements at the beginning of our century. This book is a modest attempt at assisting the creation of a new socialist movement for the new century. The promise of socialism has not been betrayed. It still exists. In these pages we explain how the promise can be made real.

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Socialist Democracy

1.

The Promise of Socialism

“A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of communism”

When Karl Marx wrote these famous words as the first sentence of the “Communist Manifesto” in 1848 they were a statement of hope for the future, a future that seemed for much of the twentieth century a real possibility.

Today capitalism seems to have laid that spectre to rest and emerged triumphant to undisputed mastery of the world. A capitalist 'New World Order' has been declared, one which picks over the bones of the third world economies while launching waves of austerity and repression against workers in the advanced capitalist countries.

Under these circumstances why should working-class militants study Marxism? Try to write a Marxist programme? Organise a party of the working-class? Prepare for revolution?

The simple answer is that we have seen the new world order. It is a world ordered by an increasingly barbaric exploitation of humanity and the planet it lives on. A more just or ordered capitalism is not on offer. In fact even present society with all its injustices is not on offer. What

does face us if we stand aside is history in reverse as our income, environment and remaining democratic rights are eaten away. There is only one alternative and one hope. That hope is socialism.

The new world order has been put to the test. The United Nations, as always, turns out to be a rubber stamp for U.S. imperialism. Where U.S. interests are involved, as in Iraq, massive force is used. Elsewhere, as in Bosnia, cynical capitulation to the warlords with the most guns leaves their victims defenceless while the U.S. attempts to impose a reactionary 'peace' settlement based on the notion of ethnically pure states, an idea supposedly banished with the defeat of the Nazis.

The three major capitalist power blocs are in fierce competition, each offering a plan for the world economy which guarantees their own interests. In Africa mass starvation continues while "debt relief" plans do more to relieve Western bankers than African populations who see much needed resources sucked out by the West. In Russia and Eastern Europe the majority of workers are finding out about capitalism the hard way - through repression, privatisation and mass unemployment. In the advanced capitalist countries recession is met by austerity policies and attacks on welfare rights which means further economic downturn, unemployment and attacks on democratic rights; all to ensure that the rate of profit is increased.

Capitalism

But capitalism is just one of a series of societies organised around a particular mode of production that have dominated human history. Like the others it's existence benefits one particular class which concentrates and owns the surplus wealth. Like the others it is born, develops, decays and will die.

Class societies reach their final stage when the social relations they have generated begin to strangle the productive forces they themselves have unleashed. It for this reason that Marxists say that we live today in the period of capitalist decline. Mass starvation when there is plenty of food. Construction cutbacks while the numbers of homeless grow. Services cut while peoples needs go unmet. Economic plans that project mass unemployment as a constant feature of future society. The gap between what is possible and what is currently realised grows larger and larger. The issue isn't if capitalism will survive - the issue is

what will replace it? Barbarian remnants on a raped and polluted planet? Or a socialist society under the control of people who plan to meet their own needs? The answer depends on working class struggle and above all on the activists who are willing today to study, organise and fight in preparation for the struggles of tomorrow.

The ultimate demise of capitalism is not dependent on the victory of socialism. It is built into the very structure of capitalism itself. The laws which exposed the dynamics of capitalism were elaborated by Karl Marx and developed out of his study of the fundamental workings of the capitalist system.

Under capitalism the worker owns nothing of the means of production. To live he or she must sell their labour. Part of the fruit of their labour time is used to pay the worker. The rest is the very heart of capitalist exploitation. It is surplus value from which the owner's profit is made. But to be converted to profit the extra goods produced must be sold. But who is to buy this surplus? The workers can only buy the fraction they have been paid for. Other capitalists will buy the rest to add to their capital only if they can further increase production and sales. But at the same time they continually attempt to limit the income and thereby the consumption of the worker. From this arises the business cycle - the cyclical crises of overproduction which lead to slump and mass unemployment. Behind the business cycle lies an even more vicious twist of the screw. Surplus value can only be generated by workers, but as profit is reinvested in new plant and equipment the proportion spent on labour falls so producing a constant downward pressure on the rate of profit.

These tendencies mean that capitalist society is constantly prone to crisis. To protect the rate of profit the methods of production are constantly being revolutionised to increase productivity and the part of labour appropriated by the capitalist. There is a headlong rush to expand markets which has led to the globalisation of the economy. Large capitalists eat smaller, leading to the growth of multinational monopolies. Small farmers, owners and independent tradespeople are proletarianised - stripped of the possibility of controlling a segment of production for themselves and forced to live by their labour power.

These tendencies are not part of a vast conspiracy by capitalists but are built into the system of production. For that reason they are totally irrational in nature. The struggle to maintain the rate of profit will not

stop because the capitalists stand aghast at mass starvation, unemployment or the destruction of the environment. Only the working class dismantling the system will permit the organisation of an economy based on meeting the needs of the human race.

Unfortunately it's not possible to talk about a final crisis for capitalism. There will almost always be the possibility of extending its life through increased exploitation, war and economic slump. Before the advent of the 1st world war capitalism had reached its limit within the narrow confines of national capitalism. It escaped by transforming itself into imperialism - a system that merged productive and banking capital to create finance capital and aimed at the globalisation of the economy. This aim was achieved many years ago. So it is thus completely incorrect to see the so-called third world as underdeveloped, required to engage with the capitalist market more openly, and as gradually catching up with the West. Rather the third world is the way it is because of capitalism, having served a number of changing roles within the world system; as a source of raw materials, a dumping ground where excess capital could be placed, and today as a centre of super-exploitation where millions starve while surplus value still continues to flow West. It's a role as a dumping ground, source of raw materials and a store for a vast reserve army of labour that will be Russia's fate if capitalism is restored.

The enormous development of trade and export of capital has raised the problems of capitalism's search for profit to a new acute level. Third world debt, the massive U.S. debt, the massive debts built up by credit deregulation and a hyperinflated property market are the result of profits unable to make further profits from feeding the starving or housing the homeless but only from frenzied monetary speculation.

A classic sign of decay is the inability of capitalist political structures to keep up with this growth of capital. Deregulation of financial controls has led to billions chasing the fast buck. The result has been daylight robbery - it's estimated that the grandchildren of today's U.S. working class will still be paying for the billions stolen in the great Savings and Loan scam when the state had to bail out U.S. financial institutions. It has been true for a long time that the major multinational companies have greater assets than most national governments. Now the surplus they generate dwarfs the national reserves of even major industrial powers. The result is massive bouts of speculation - as for example the various crises of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, when flows

of hundred of billions of dollars utterly overwhelmed the ability of national governments to decide policy.

The fact is that the nation state is no longer a convincing framework for regulating economic life. But the capitalists still need nationalism politically to convince their 'own' workers that they share a common bond, to legitimise their rule and support military aggression at home and abroad. Where they try to build supranational institutions these either lack democratic credibility (the European Union) or are obviously tools in the hands of the strongest powers (the U.S. and the U.N.).

An international political structure is an urgent necessity to deal with the realities of a global economy. Until the working class are able to build internationalism from below this can only mean the domination of one power through economic might. Yet such a power does not exist. The U.S. is overwhelmingly the military superpower yet is in relative economic decline and is unable to force its programme on Japan and Germany. The capitalists will have no difficulty in agreeing that working people pay the price in unemployment, wage cuts and declining services but this in itself is not enough and in fact only increases the vicious competition between them.

The clearest manifestation of this was the G.A.T.T. world trade agreement, drawn up at the behest of the major imperialist powers with the senior multinational companies sitting in as advisors. The result is that the U.S., Japan and the E.U. will continue to monopolise 80% of world trade, and the poorest countries will share less than 1% and in return will be asked to eliminate subsidies and protectionist measures which are 'unfair' to multinationals.

A clear definition of what unfairness means is given by a key clause ruling it illegal to block imports because of their method of production. In other words national governments will not be able to object to goods produced by slave or child labour or those involving dangerous conditions or high levels of pollution. In the name of competition local capitalists will be able to push down working conditions and wages in their own countries.

Across the world the advanced countries have at times reported economic recovery but worry about the absence of a feel good factor. It is not hard to understand why. The recoveries have been built on a sustained offensive against the working class: restructuring of the

workforce, deregulation of industry and finance, privatisation of public assets, flexible work practices - including contracts for zero hours where you wait by the telephone at the employer's convenience! The whole process has seen massive subsidies for the well off and major cuts in the living standards of poor people. During all this the trade union leaders and their social democratic partners have stood aside or become absorbed into the capitalist offensive. Yet still capitalism has not solved its problems.

Socialism

Marxism proposes a straightforward solution to the irrationality and injustice of capitalism; abolition of private property, control by producers over the means of production; direct democracy and distribution according to need.

Many attempts have been made to refute the programme of Marxism. They have all failed and capitalism has depended on money power and military force to defend itself. Many of the arguments against socialism are hoary with age; for example the argument that people are naturally aggressive, acquisitive and capitalistic. This is the sheerest nonsense. People are anything but machines and endless varieties of human cultures have existed with an endless range of values and ways of living. People have happily existed within these and accepted them as the only possible way to live - for example one of the obstacles in the way of western colonialism was the difficulty in explaining the concept of private property to the natives.

Marx differed from earlier socialists who offered utopian blueprints of their own individual ideas of the perfect society. Marx took a hard-headed scientific approach. He argued that just as earlier societies had lived under "primitive tribal communism" because there was no surplus to distribute and therefore no class which could live off the work carried out by others so socialism would only be possible if there were the means to produce an 'abundance' - that is enough to meet the needs of all the members of society, not just a few. Capitalism was unique in that its constant revolutionising of the means of production made abundance possible while at the same time producing in the working class the instrument with the political power to overthrow the system.

In a more sophisticated critique it has been argued that abundance is impossible because human needs are limitless - for example that once

people are provided with clothes they then need adornment and a 'need' for fashion arises. Experience shows us that this is not the case. Human needs are complex but they are not limitless. Most people, given food, shelter, clothing, healthcare and the opportunity to develop their own culture behave quite differently to those denied these things in a society of generalised scarcity. In any case there is a hierarchy of needs. People do not 'need' a Rolls Royce in the same way that they need food. A shortage of food leads to a deadly life and death battle. A shortage of Rolls Royces only to some bad temper among the rich.

In any case it is quite clear that, at least in the advanced capitalist countries, many needs could now be met at very low or zero cost. This is especially so where the marginal cost - the cost of producing yet one more item - is vanishingly small compared to the overall cost of the operation. This applies to all basic foods in a society where massive surpluses are destroyed and farmers paid not to produce, and also to clothing and transport. A substantial building drive not aimed at more empty offices would quickly reduce the cost of housing. What prevents this? Quite simply it is the production for profit under capitalism. It's worth noting that under capitalism property rights are now being extended to new fields - 'intellectual property' - that is ideas, and genetic information - including the human genome. In fact the cost of copying computer software or breeding plants is vanishingly small, so only the powers of the state can enforce these laws rather than the money power of capitalist ownership.

Defeated at this level the capitalist critic then falls back on the defence of the 'free market'. The 'invisible hand' of the market delivers, they argue, while planning is undemocratic and unworkable. In fact socialists do not oppose markets per se. - markets are a feature of most societies and would certainly be necessary in the initial stages of socialism. But to bow to the market would be an act of monumental despair - a refuting of the very idea that humans could ever control their own lives. A simple glance at the newspaper will show how well the market is adjusting the lives of ordinary workers today. The freer the market, the stock market for example, the more unpredictable, unstable and irrational it appears.

Today socialists are 'proved' wrong by being required to show one country where socialism exists. Thus the fact that something does not exist today is taken as proof that it can never exist. Not only is this logically false it is also historically ignorant. It is an argument that there

can never be anything new in the world and no such thing as progress. An obvious nonsense given the huge development of society over the last 250 years. Slavery existed as the basis of society for over 1,000 years and the divine right of kings for centuries; no doubt the same type of apologist for this oppression was claiming they would exist forever. These forms of society looked a lot more permanent than capitalism does today and, just like these, capitalism will come to an end. Whoever denies this, believing the world will always exist as it does now, is the real utopian

Yet the present leadership of the working class movement accepts all of these arguments and accepts a new world order which claims '**the end of history**' and of class struggle. To make the old arguments seem new they talk of new realism and partnership but even genuinely new movements such as the Greens cannot rise above classes and are as divided as the rest of society.

The real alternative is planning. Capitalists denounce it by pointing to the waste and inefficiency overseen by Stalinism. But we reject the idea that Stalinism was ever socialism. Both capitalism and Stalinism were wasteful - under the Stalinists most of the waste was expressed inside the factory in what the 'West' would call 'overmanning' and in rotting stocks of material. In the 'West' the waste is in the dole queue, the idle factories, unsold goods or excess capacity and the empty pockets produced by recession. In fact Marxists argue that not only is bureaucratic planning undemocratic but it is also a contradiction in terms. An economic system that is planned can only operate on the basis of the most open and genuine direct democracy. It is only possible to plan if there is complete and open access to all relevant information in order to allocate resources and correct mistakes. The bureaucrats, having usurped the position of the working class and living in constant fear of discovery and overthrow, could not even consider democracy and so built a completely irrational system that was bound to fail.

Bureaucracy

It is in this context that the socialist debate about the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy retains its relevance today. The major section of the world socialist movement, organised in various communist parties, fell down before Stalin and supported the reaction and repression that he represented. This led to a whole cycle of defeats as the interests of

workers all over the world were subordinated to the Stalinist bureaucracy's foreign policy.

By contrast the continuity of the Russian revolution was expressed by Leon Trotsky and by the world movement, the Fourth International, which he founded. The left opposition to Stalin's betrayals saw the counter-revolution in Russia as being a process of bureaucratic degeneration of the new workers state. Trends towards bureaucracy have less weight when the mass of the working class are active and on the offensive. It was a different story when the workers were decimated, when famine, civil war and imperialist counter-revolution were unleashed, and when the revolution, as it was in Russia, was isolated from the promise of world revolution. In this situation a nascent bureaucracy was able to grow, dominate and repress working-class militants and to act as the grave-digger of the revolution. But it did not restore capitalism.

The Stalinist bureaucracy controlled the surplus of the working class at the point of production but it did not appropriate it. It did not have personal ownership of the means of production and did not restore capitalist property relations. It could not do so without destroying itself as a caste. Many of the social gains of the revolution were preserved in severely distorted form but essentially, in the absence of the tyranny of the market, the bureaucracy ruled by state terror. These terror tactics enabled it to develop the economy extensively, but when it came to intensive development it was unable to allow the openness and initiative that would have been necessary. Planning, as we have said, would have required the most extensive democracy. What passed for planning - the bureaucratic attempt to control all aspects of the economy - was impossible and led to stagnation, corruption and decay.

The fall of the bureaucracy could have come from working class revolt under the banner of socialism. There were many attempts at this, in East Germany, Hungary and Poland; all ruthlessly suppressed. When the bureaucracy fell under the economic and political offensive of imperialism the working class was no longer organised independently and able to intervene politically to impose its own solution. The struggle for recomposition of the working class movement is now a precondition for halting the massive attacks on workers and the pauperisation of the Eastern economies.

The prophets of new realism have one overwhelming fact on their side.

Surely the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and the non-capitalist economies of eastern Europe rules out any alternative to capitalism even if these were not themselves socialist?

History refutes this. The collapse of Stalinism opens new possibilities and opportunities for the development of the workers movement although it is, in its immediate impact, felt as a major defeat. The workers have suffered other defeats without class struggle ending and have then gone on to score major victories. Capitalism in its industrial form, and the workers movement it spawned, is only two centuries old. Initially working class organisation was illegal, and began to express itself politically as a junior partner to liberal capitalism. Freed of these shackles the workers built a mass international, only to see their leaders betray, smash the international and support the mutual slaughter of the First World War. With much effort a new international was constructed around the victory of the Russian revolution, only to face Stalin's betrayal and eventual collaboration with fascism. In the process the flower of the European working class - the German workers movement - was wiped out in the Nazi death camps.

If these setbacks and the associated slaughter of millions didn't mean the end of socialism then the present situation certainly won't. In fact we are, in relatively developed countries, surrounded by the gains of the working class - social security provision, education, trade unions, the right to vote, pensions, health care and so on. A massive attack is being launched on these - in fact the argument that class struggle is over is part of the attack - yet we are not facing the young and vigorous capitalism of yesterday but an old and increasingly parasitic system divided within itself.

The crisis in the workers movement is just that - a crisis and not a death rattle. The crisis in the workers movement is mirrored by a crisis of leadership in the capitalist class which has seen over a decade of world Thatcherism fail to solve its problems. Their 'solutions' have no credibility but they have the advantage that the socialist alternative has also lost credibility through the betrayals and collapse of Stalinism, and the rush to the right by social democratic and labour parties.

The degenerate workers states were an extreme form of a process familiar to all workers - the tendency towards bureaucratisation in the workers movement. This bureaucratisation - the servant replacing the master - becomes entrenched when the bureaucrats develop material

interests totally separate from the vast majority of the members of the organisations they represent. These interests - power, money, status etc. - determine the bureaucrats pursuit of policies which seek not the end of exploitation but its regulation by the state. The goals of the workers organisations are sacrificed to state acceptance and support for the organisations themselves, which are the foundation and source of the bureaucrats privileges. Defence of the working class becomes defence of their organisation and their job.

What has to be stressed here is that the whole process involves a tendency rather than some iron law. The rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy required the exhaustion and isolation of the revolutionary forces. Even then Stalinism did not become inevitable, but had to fight a political battle with the left opposition whose outcome was not decided in advance.

In the same way the structures of trade unions and workers parties are under constant pressure from the capitalist state to become police instruments for the control of the working class. The bureaucrats and functionaries who lead the unions will always tend to give way to these pressures. Even those bureaucrats who oppose from a left perspective tend to limit the forms of working class opposition. As unions become larger they ape the business methods of the capitalist firms and widen the gap between the leadership and the masses. But it is not inevitable that when workers fight back they will go down to defeat at the hands of those who profess to lead them. Battles can be fought today - against 'social partnership', 'new realism', challenging restrictions on democracy and reclaiming the unions for working people. No matter what the relationship of forces, these battles have to be fought. Even when unsuccessful they can generate a level of political consciousness and organisation that will greatly ease the task of workers in future mobilisations.

Revolution

By withholding its labour from the capitalists and taking control of the means of production through revolution the working class could simultaneously destroy capitalism and undermine the conditions in which bureaucracy in the workers movement has developed. However achieving this means overcoming the present feeling of atomisation developed in a working class immersed in the struggle for an existence which is constantly threatened by unemployment and sickness. Even

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withdrawing labour in a purely defensive struggle risks victimisation. Some recent changes in capitalism have served to weaken the working class, at least in their immediate effects. The industrial working class in all developed countries is now a minority of the class as a whole and within it many mass concentrations of labour, out of which developed a high degree of class consciousness, have been replaced by smaller and more fragmented workplaces. Deregulation of the labour market has produced many part time and temporary jobs and the mass of jobs in the public sector are some way removed from the direct processes of production. Given that the act of destroying capitalism and building socialism requires the active involvement of the vast majority of a working class which has developed a high level of class consciousness these changes can and have produced demoralisation among socialists.

However the import of the changes in the structure of the working class has been distorted in a one sided fashion by the enemies of socialism. The need for educated and highly productive workforces creates a powerful base for resistance. Workforces which depend on the skills and flexibility of labour cannot be easily subjected to the coercive power of mass regimentation. There is a higher and higher interdependence between workers and workplaces which means the withdrawal of labour can have an immediate effect. The workforce includes more and more sections of society, especially women, and the vast majority of the working class is committed to social and political gains such as health care and the right to vote, which in itself is a barrier to capitalist plans to impose hardship on the working class.

The changes which capitalism has gone through recently are different forms of changes which capitalism has always undergone; the development of the socialisation and productivity of labour. In the last analysis this indicates not a weakening of the power of the working class but an increase in its potential strength. If this does not appear so now this is mostly due to the present leaderships of the working class which fear unleashing the initiative and power of rank and file workers as much as the capitalists. This would threaten their position as broker of exploitation and threaten the system which allows such exploitation to take place. In order to combat the new divisions which the reorganisation of capitalism constantly introduces it is necessary to seek new alliances of solidarity across workforces both nationally and internationally and inspire the working class with an alternative political vision

at least as broad and fundamental as the present reorganisation of capitalism.

It is in this context that socialists understand that their first duty is to defend the working class and to fight to improve their material conditions. We have no time for the idea that 'worse means better' - that the more workers are oppressed the more likely revolution becomes. It is true that unbearable oppression can spark rebellion but it does so in a class that is enfeebled and less prepared for the obstacles in its way.

However no set of reforms, no matter how extensive, will amount to a beachhead allowing a gradual transformation of capitalism to socialism. Because the working class has no ownership of the means of production and lives only by its labour power (unlike capitalists in earlier feudal society) it is unable to build bases or islands of socialism within capitalist society. This lack of ownership also means that the bulk of working peoples lives are taken up with the struggle for existence.

Periodic spontaneous uprisings by the class will also be insufficient in themselves to overcome the centralised power of the capitalist state backed by the power of a global economy. Unlike other revolutions the proletarian revolution has to pull itself up by its own bootstraps. The most oppressed layers of society will have to, in one bound, make themselves master of that society and then begin transforming it root and branch. This requires an act of mass collective consciousness unique in the long story of human history.

Neither the swift lessons of mass struggle nor the decades of pragmatic experience built up by the most advanced sections of the class will provide this. Of course workers will struggle not because of the urging of socialists but because the class struggle is real and they must fight if they can. Action and struggle educates the working class and on occasion can propel them in a revolutionary direction. One task of socialists is to aid and organise for that process and to work for the greatest democracy within the workers movement. Nevertheless the new revolutionary wave, when it comes, will have at its hands the lessons of past struggles only if socialists study, learn and organise to preserve those lessons.

The bridge between those who undertake these tasks and the class as a whole is the revolutionary party. The only secure vehicle for Marx-

ist theory is a party of the working class organised for revolution. This fits the individual into a political and historical context, enables collective study and above all allows praxis - the combination of theory and practice which permits revolutionaries to learn from working-class struggle while attempting to win sections of the class to the revolutionary programme.

Many forms of revolutionary organisation are possible, but only those based on the general principles outlined by Lenin allow for the massive expansion of class consciousness necessary to successfully carry through and consolidate the revolution.

The Leninist theory is widely misunderstood as a theory of organisation. It is in fact a political theory calling for a body of professional revolutionaries linked organically to the working class through the most advanced layers of workers. Praxis is achieved by strict discipline linked to the fullest internal democracy. A link with the organised workers is essential to prevent degeneration of the organisation and this in turn depends on a perspective of the imminence of revolution; although in fact the revolutionary party can only establish itself as a mass party on the eve of revolution. By imminence we do not mean that revolution will break out tomorrow but that the stage of development that capitalism has reached puts the question on the historical agenda.

According to Lenin's dictum, revolutions occur when the ruling class is no longer able to rule in the old way, the oppressed are no longer willing to be ruled in the old way and a revolutionary leadership exists which can pose itself as the answer to the crisis. Although this is meant as a conjunctural analysis the economic and political crisis evidenced over the past couple of decades indicates that at a deeper level this question is posed. Despite the collapse of the Stalinist regimes dreams of a 'new world order' have proved to be an illusion. Despite the huge opportunities offered to capitalism its contradictions reassert themselves in economic crisis, in turn generating political crises in the old established parties and institutions.

The much lauded triumph of capitalism is therefore being magnified a hundredfold by the media and by its propagandists. The ideological offensive is much greater than the physical one. Yet they do have a physical base. On a world scale there has been two decades of defeats,

deregulation and restructuring of the labour market which have decimated traditional bastions of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries. Yet the central structures of the class remains and so also do the central gains of democratic and social rights. Embedded in the class are countless numbers of militants with a class consciousness forged in struggle, countless more embittered by their own privation and the glaring inequality all around them. Workers and the poor have fought back, from massive strikes in France to peasant rebellion in Mexico.

The capitalists try and hold these forces, and the growing forces of youth, back from struggle by announcing the death of socialism. In its place they try to defuse resistance to further attacks by presenting the alternatives of racism and fascism.

We can see that struggles go on all the time, but usually in a local and limited way. We can also say that in the worldwide struggle and in the fragmentation of capitalism we will see all possible outcomes. In some areas the capitalists will doubtless be successful - drowning the calls for bread and justice in blood. The point is that socialism needs only one victory to put itself forward as a global alternative. A united force of the working class, vanguard workers and revolutionary Marxists taking power anywhere in the world would light a beacon of hope - the hope of socialism.

Ireland

Can the capitalists rule Ireland in the old way? The answer is clearly no. In the international capitalist system Ireland is a small semi-colony utterly subordinated to imperialism. Both partitioned states have failed. In the North a bigoted loyalist reaction is totally dependent on the political, military and economic subvention of a declining imperialist power. In the South successive attempts to build a strong native capitalism have failed. The British subvention in the North is neatly matched by a massive national debt and a European Union subvention to the South which has played a major role in bailing out the state but whose days are numbered. Unemployment has rocketed while the safety valve of mass emigration has hidden the underlying crisis and avoided otherwise inevitable massive social explosions. In the North ceasefires have not resulted in a new accepted and stable political

framework demonstrating conclusively that there exists underlying political problems which imperialism has not been able to solve despite the opportunities given to it.

Are workers willing to be ruled in the old way? The simple answer is that no overall anti-capitalist alternative exists within the Irish working class. What does exist is a long history of combativity, expressed in the North mainly through the resistance of nationalist workers and in the South through the trade unions, working class communities and the rebellions of women and young people against clerical power.

The parties which have put themselves at the head of these struggles or sought to present themselves as their natural representatives, the Republican Movement in the north and the Labour Party and Democratic Left in the South, are rapidly retreating in front of reaction, betraying the hopes that many workers, women and youth had placed in them. Although the mass of workers will not automatically look to their left, many will, and the rest can be won to revolutionary socialism if a credible organisation can be built which identifies the key tasks and struggles which workers face and the correct policies which should be advanced.

The following programme identifies these tasks and the programme necessary to achieve them. An absolutely central task then for socialists is the battle of ideas, to win the most militant workers to the deep conviction that only the revolutionary socialist road detailed in this programme offers the way forward to a free and socialist future. This isn't just a question of theoretical discussion or propaganda, although the Irish left has traditionally ignored theory to its detriment; it is also one of connecting these ideas to the living struggles which workers in Ireland are, and will in the future, be compelled to take up.

The enormous, historic task involved in creating socialism demands the utmost clarity of ideas and this book of ideas is by no means either complete or the last word. It is however unique in its understanding of the tasks facing socialists in Ireland today. The most thoughtful, critical and committed will read it, understand it and join us in the attempt to put it into practice.

2.

Against Maastricht and a Capitalist Europe

All the major southern parties are united in support of the European Union and further integration as the panacea for our economic, political and social ills. This support is probably strongest in the ranks of the Trade Union bureaucracy and is the lynchpin of a social partnership plan where the workers pay now for a land of milk and honey in the future. So what exactly are they all in favour of?

The answer is quite simple - Europe is a central part of the global development of world capitalism but it is also the weakest link in the chain of imperialist blocs set up to manage this globalisation. Historically the instrument of political rule for capitalism has always been the nation state. Not only does it provide the armed force necessary to ensure capitalist rule, it mediates that rule, regulating and legitimising a system that by itself would quickly tear itself apart in bitter class conflict. Yet the nation state is no longer a sufficient instrument of rule. Over 100 trans-national companies [T.N.C.s] have capital assets substantially greater than even the economies of advanced capitalist societies.

With a world state not even on the agenda regional groupings above the nation state have developed - rival groupings centred on the U.S., Japan and Europe.

Europe is in many ways the weakest. The major power, Germany, does not have the decisive power that the U.S. and even Japan have in their own spheres of interest. The area encloses a number of imperialist powers and inter-imperialist rivalry is intense. Two world wars this century originating mainly within Europe is graphic testimony to this. Large elements of capital from the other trading blocs are already established within the E.U. Europe is also in the front line of the project to restore capitalism in Eastern Europe and the former U.S.S.R. Above all it contains within its borders the oldest and most developed working class in the world, with a whole history of social gains built up in struggle. For European capitalism to survive the new inter-imperialist competition created by globalisation a European-wide plan is required, one that can unite European capitalism against its rivals and act decisively to defeat the working class and roll back the gains it has made.

The nature of the European project in the 1980's was explained by "The Economist magazine [3 Sept. 1988];

"Big European companies were early champions of the idea of a unified market. They felt they needed wider, less red-taped horizons than their individual home markets could provide. The world market? No. A big sheltered European market was what they had in mind and that is what they are now demanding."

This protected bloc had a range of subsidies to protect various areas from world competition - Farming, shipbuilding and steel were three areas of high subsidy. In more advanced areas like cars external tariffs or quotas on imports were used. In turn these measures were set within a free market in manufactured goods designed to boost intra-European trade, expanding and strengthening the European fraction of world capitalism.

Yet overall the policy was a failure. With the exception of Germany the various economies lagged behind the U.S. and Japan. This was most marked in the advanced high-growth sectors like electronics. A 1985

deficit of 14 billion dollars in this sector has now risen to 40 billion. European firms now hold only 10% of the stake in a world industry valued at 530 billion dollars. In 1990 Phillips of Holland lost 1 billion dollars, Bull of France lost 331 million dollars and I.C.L. of Britain was sold to Fujitsu of Japan for 1.39 billion.

In response to the decline in competitiveness of decisive sections of European capitalism a consortium of the largest European companies organised to pressure national governments and the European commission. These groups did not form a European capitalist class but with some confusion and mixed motives they were beginning the process of attempting to meet the pressures of the world capitalist market. They found to hand a central structure - the European commission, a bureaucracy which, with the power of the T.N.C.'s behind it, was able to outline a strategic plan with a number of goals.

These goals - enshrined in the Single European Act [S.E.A.] - read simply as a programme for big capital on the offensive: The free movement of commodities, the standardisation of technical norms, the opening up of the public sector across Europe to privatisation, free movement of workers and of the liberal professions, a common market for services, liberalising the movement of capital, cutting state subsidies and harmonising indirect taxes.

They contained one major political proposal which attempted to tackle the problem of the fragmentation of policy making in national states. On some issues qualified majority voting would replace the need for unanimous agreement by national governments, This was agreed without any fuss because it did not appear to directly confront inter-imperialist rivalry and seemed simply to serve as a way of brow-beating the smaller states while exploitation of the third world could continue without hindrance.

The implementation of the S.E.A. had mixed results. It did benefit big capital in general, but the real winners were in the ranks of finance capital. It led to a wave of speculative takeovers and mergers - 117 in 1982, 237 in 1985 and 622 in 1989, garnering massive profits for the banks which arranged the deals. It also forced Japanese and U.S.

capital to relocate within the European “magic circle.” U.S. investment rose by almost 40% between 1986 and 1988 and Japanese investment doubled over the same period.

Some capitalists were quick to see that these steps were woefully inadequate to the task of generating a dynamic European capitalism and the short-term gains by finance capital could not disguise the fact that European firms were continuing to lose out to Japanese and American competitors. In 1988 a report by the commission, led by Jacques Delors, argued that only a currency union would enable European capital to fully reap the gains of integration which otherwise would actually benefit U.S. and Japanese firms most.

However currency union requires a stable currency which in turn requires a central bank, a state, an army, a common foreign policy and so on. Delors and his backers did not flinch. The Maastricht agreement of 1991 laid out a strategy to achieve all this. There were to be a number of stages which made clear that this was no mere technical exercise but an offensive against the working class.

Stage one set savage currency convergence criteria; inflation within 1.5% of the three lowest, interest rates within 2% of the three lowest, Budget deficits less than 3% of G.D.P. and National debt less than 60% of G.D.P. Also included was currency stability - no devaluation over the 2 years prior to union.

Stage two was to create a European Monetary Institute

Stage three would see currency union and the creation of a central bank specifically excluded from any democratic control and with tight monetarist goals.

Alongside the economic goals went political and military ones. A framework for a common foreign policy was agreed and linked to the Western European Union [W.E.U.], an offshoot of N.A.T.O.

The first steps to creating a European nationality were taken in the traditional way - by finding ways to divide the working class and finding “outsiders” to oppress and scapegoat. Fortress Europe, including the

Schengen agreement, acted to bar those fleeing oppression and target immigrant workers. Significantly this agreement was specifically designed to be kept out of the remit of the European court of justice.

The Maastricht agreement contained a brutal realism about its goals but the means of achieving them were dressed up in a bourgeois idealism designed to disguise the difficulties and disagreements that lay in its path. There was never any hope that the disparate capitalist classes and their economies would gradually converge. 'Black Wednesday' showed how uneven the development of capitalism in Europe was and the inability of the European governments, individually or collectively, to withstand the massive capital flows that would overthrow the fiction of economic convergence.

The crisis came but in the absence of any organised resistance by the working class the reactionary project was not killed off.

Instead a new orthodoxy holds out the promise of a multi-track Europe. Behind the verbiage however there is still division in the capitalist camp and the recognition of a harsher reality - European unity is possible, but only if one state - Germany - holds hegemony over the other imperialist powers. More importantly it requires an historic defeat of workers across Europe and a return to social conditions more redolent of the last century.

So the history of European integration under capitalism is one of stumbling from one crisis to another. Yet each crisis leaves the capitalist's project still alive and sees further erosion of workers rights. There is only one way to explain this - and that's by looking at the opposition.

Irish and British Social Democracy has swung from opposition to the E.U. to becoming its most determined supporters. The whole of European Social Democracy has a history of gradual absorption of its bureaucracy into the structures of capitalism. The E.U. offers layer upon layer of bureaucracy and at each level there is a seat for the trade union or social democrat appointee. It's natural enough for a movement that at its heart is committed to capitalism to support structures that capitalism assures them are necessary for its survival and to dress

that support up as a project of reform. The fig leaf is called the social charter - the idea that rules and regulations surrounding workplace rights can be gradually extended to increase workers rights and living standards.

Unfortunately for social democracy this is reformism without any real hope of reform. The social charter is a hastily cobbled together list of pious aspirations. Despite the opposition of British Toryism it falls well short of any guarantees for workers. In any case every other aspect of the Maastricht agreement points in the other direction, It spells out the harshest European monetarism. It demands a privatisation of public assets and removes the main weapon employed by old style social democratic governments - the control of national fiscal policy, that is government spending and tax policy designed to sustain employment and incomes. The idea that the E.U. itself would undertake the public spending necessary for any social -democratic project was smashed in 1992 when Delors attempted to increase E.U. spending from 1.2% of member states G.D.P. to 1.37%. The attempt fell on its face. Fiscal reform at the E.U. level is a non-starter.

Ireland

“Free traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another, since these same gentlemen also refuse to understand how in the same country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another.” [Karl Marx]

In Ireland the road to European union began in the late '50s and early '60s with the abandonment of the project to build an independent Irish capitalism and the adoption of a new strategy of opening the economy to multinational capital. It was argued that this strategy would re-invigorate native capital while freeing it of its dependence on Britain. In 1970 62% Of Irish exports were to Britain and only 13% to the E.U.. By 1994 the respective figures were 34% and 41% - figures made more comprehensible however if we see that exports to Britain are concentrated in a much shrunken native capital while the bulk of exports to the rest of the E.U. are by multi-nationals using Ireland as an aircraft carrier into Europe.

When Ireland joined the E.U. the then foreign minister, Dr. Hillery, declared that membership would bring;

“Full employment, the end of involuntary emigration and a standard of living comparable to the best in Europe”.

Between 1972 and 1985 more than half the jobs in the previously protected internal market had gone. The external share of the Irish clothing market went from 8% to 80% - even the local food production sector lost 30% of jobs. After 10 years of membership unemployment was 18%, inflation was rampant and the standard of living 55% of the European average. On top of that a national debt of roughly 116% of G.D.P. was recorded for 1986.

In order to reverse this devastating record a new offensive was launched in the 1980's. Financial probity became the order of the day and national agreements with the trade union bureaucracy shifted from small - scale compromise with the working class to integrating the trade union bureaucracy in an attack upon that class. The pushing back of the aspirations of workers, the weakening of their industrial power, a new flood of emigrants and a programme of austerity and privatisation opened a new chapter.

A new capitalist stability began to emerge. Growth has been 5% per annum from 1987 to 1993. The inflation rate has been one of the lowest in Europe. Public sector borrowing is at an all time low and the national debt is being reduced slowly in relative terms by the G.D.P. growth rate, although increasing in absolute terms by £IR 1 billion a year. This relative success (in capitalism's terms) has not changed in any way the underlying structural weakness and vulnerability of Irish capitalism, which remains a small semi-colony.

Indeed the weakness of Irish capitalism is evidenced by the mad economic policies which the state has had to pursue in order to maintain its commitment to the imperialist's project. Irish governments have not borrowed money from the exchequer but from foreign banks and exchanged the foreign currency for Irish pounds supplied by the central bank. The central bank has then used this foreign currency to buy Irish pounds from international capitalists in order to support the value of the Irish currency on the international market and keep it within the

framework of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. Since 1979 £IR 14 billion of foreign currency has been wasted on this crazy project which increases the national debt, eating up workers income tax receipts to the tune of over £2 billion a year, and maintains the value of the currency at a level which assists in the creation of huge unemployment and emigration.

Irish capitalism's new policies have however given the multinationals good reasons to invest in Ireland. Strikes are very low in the multinational sector. Wages are comparatively low and profits higher than in the rest of the European community. The stability of Irish capitalism has been massively assisted by structural and other E.U. funds which contribute £1.3 billion [3.5% of GNP] - though it should be remembered that Ireland's contributions are paid by working class taxes and incoming subsidies paid to the capitalists. The most recent statistics show that G.D.P. per inhabitant has risen from 64% of E.U. average in 1980 to almost 70% now - a figure which hides a truly obscene division between rich and poor and the necessity to export Irish youth. Unfortunately it also heralds the end of such massive transfers as the standard of living measured by these inflated statistics means that the state may no longer qualify for them in the near future.

This short-term stability, bought at a terrible cost, faces overwhelming pressure in the future. To meet the needs of finance capital and attract future inward investment Dublin needs to be in the inner circle of Economic and Monetary Union [E.M.U.]. Yet to go in without Britain would provoke an unbearable crisis in the native economy. It is estimated by the Irish Exporters Association that about 120,000 jobs in native firms are dependent on the British market. A single European currency, which the 26 counties would be part of, would rise in value against Sterling forcing the price of Irish goods up on the British market and the price of British goods down on the Irish market. Multinationals in the state could switch to British suppliers and some Irish firms may find it more profitable to relocate in Britain. In summary much of native industry would be destroyed by British competition and unemployment would rise.

So the best that can be hoped for is a familiar picture - Ireland a

province once again with low wages, mass unemployment, mass emigration and inadequate health, education and welfare systems.

Some left reformists recognise this picture but argue that in the process of imperialist domination Ireland will develop a modern economy. Fat chance! The 'development' that takes place integrates Ireland as a dependent peripheral region - it actively blocks the development of an Irish economy organically based on its own resources and the needs of its people.

International Socialism

The socialist alternative starts from this understanding of exactly what is going on. Such an understanding points in only one direction. The whole Maastricht process designed to create and strengthen a European imperialism must be rejected. As we have said the move towards a single currency is not a neutral, technical exercise and the move towards a united European imperialism is neither inevitable nor progressive. To stand against it is no more a 'reactionary' battle against capitalism's development of labour productivity than is the fight of workers against unemployment created by firms seeking to increase productivity and competitiveness by cutting the workforce.

European capitalist integration is not just directed against the U.S. and Japan but also against the European working class. The Maastricht criteria, without which a stable single currency is impossible, means permanent recessionary economic policy with tight controls on state spending and plans to privatise state assets, necessary, among other things, to finance what state spending there is. For Irish workers especially it means that the attractiveness of Ireland as a site for mobile multinational investment will depend on relatively low wages and a docile workforce. Thus in any referenda seeking the acceptance of such a programme by Irish workers we recommend a categorical no.

The whole project involves not just an economic offensive but a political offensive as well. The development of a united E.U. entails a fortress Europe which targets immigrants and refugees and a more coordinated approach to the exploitation of the third world. It means greater powers concentrated in unelected bureaucracies without even the pretence of

democratic control which normally exists at national level. Already the Maastricht treaty authorises the W.E.U., a cold war relic and arm of N.A.T.O., to start the task of elaborating and implementing E.U. decisions. This common defence policy will require agreement on common enemies, strategies for foreign intervention and arrangements to finance the military hardware necessary. In other words the southern state will have to ditch its declared policy of neutrality, in fact the legacy of anti-imperialism, in favour of a role as foot soldiers in the army of European imperialism.

Opposition to the European capitalist project in no way implies support for a narrow nationalist development of capitalism or even a project of national socialism. The alternative to a united capitalist Europe is a United Socialist Europe. Just as the capitalists have their plans to create a European imperialism so the workers must have their's to create a United Socialist States of Europe and just as the capitalist's project is based on attacks on the working class so the workers must base their alternative on the resistance to this project. Such resistance has already been seen in many countries, general strikes in Belgium in 1993 and Spain in 1994; the Italian workers strikes in 1994 and the magnificent public sector strikes in France in 1995, which represented a total rejection of the Maastricht process. The crude austerity offensive necessitated by Maastricht promises wider social explosions in the future. Whoever denies this is denying not only the foreseeable future but also the recent past.

While these struggles have occurred at national level, and are obviously most easily organised at that level, in order to go onto the offensive to pose a Europe-wide workers alternative a European-wide programme backed by action is required. This must revolve around the building of international solidarity around workers in struggle, especially around such struggles as the massive strike wave in France etc. It means workers in the same multinational or industry organising at rank and file level on a European scale to demand an end to speed-ups, wage cuts and redundancies. The whole European workers movement must take on the demand for a 35 hour week with no loss of pay in order to reduce unemployment. Already German workers have engaged in such struggles and a campaign with similar demands created in France. During the strikes in France at the end of 1995 German workers joined their French comrades in a demonstration calling for a Europe-wide general strike.

As the uniting factor around these struggles the workers movement must put forward its own plan which doesn't set its sights on the capitalist's targets of interest rates, inflation rates and budget deficits but has its own targets of an end to unemployment, poverty, homelessness and welfare cuts. Massive state investment across Europe would be necessary to meet the workers targets. Democratic control of such a plan can only be achieved by a European Workers Parliament composed of delegates from the workers movement in each country. The undemocratic and bureaucratic nature of the present European parliament must be exposed, not in order to demand its reform, we have no illusions in a European capitalist parliament any more than we have in a national one, but to contrast the democratic alternative of socialism to the bureaucratic reality of capitalism. This is the programme which revolutionary socialists fight for as the banner which each workers movement in every country should adopt. It must also be the programme of any workers government coming to power in any European country. It is the alternative such a government would put forward in every forum of the E.U., using it as a means of breaching the Maastricht rules and reaching the workers of every country with its message.

The socialist programme rejects a fortress Europe, its attacks on immigrant workers and refugees, its attempts to stir up racism and exploit the peoples of Eastern Europe and the third world. This is expressed in demands to end all immigration controls, organise immigrant workers and extend the boundaries of the new European state to include all the peoples of Europe thus ending, for example, discriminatory practices against the workers of Eastern Europe. It means supporting the right of self-determination for all the oppressed nationalities of Europe, including the Irish, so that the unity of the new Europe would be a voluntary one of equals. Exploitation of the third world would be ended by cancelling the debts owed to European banks, opposing the plans of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and by proposals of partnership between European workers and the poor of the third world. Finally the European workers movement must oppose European imperialism, oppose the W.E.U. and N.A.T.O. and reject the United Nations which acts as a cover for the actions of world imperialism led by the United States.

The European working class has shown recently its capacity to resist. With such a programme it could move on to the offensive. Advancing this programme now requires the building of an international revolutionary socialist organisation. Such an International would use every opportunity to popularise its revolutionary programme and demonstrate by example the activity that the whole European workers movement should follow. The only free and democratic united Europe is a socialist one.

3.

Imperialism and Ireland

The hope of Irish nationalism was that political independence from Britain would result in rapid economic development. Today it is obvious that political independence has failed to deliver economic prosperity. The chronic failure of the Irish economy can be measured in terms of poverty, unemployment and emigration. Making use of the European Union (E.U.) poverty indicator set at income levels below 50% of the national average, poverty in Ireland is pervasive; in 1987 it was calculated at 23% of the population or 810,000 people, over 1 million if the figure of 60% of average income is used, one third of the population of the 26 county state! What is worse, poverty is increasing.

The second indicator of chronic economic failure is emigration. In one recent year -1989- 42,000 people left Ireland in search of a job and a home. Almost 50% of those born in the 26 county state have emigrated permanently since independence. The third is unemployment. Just after independence in 1926 the number out of work was 85,000 and in the depression of the '30's at its peak it reached 104,000. Today it is officially over 285,000 and this despite the workforce being not much larger now than it was 70 years ago.

In the North unemployment is officially over 86,000 or over 11% of the workforce. Almost half the unemployed are long term unemployed with next to no chance of ever working again. Without emigration it would be nearly double the present figure. Northern Ireland has suffered a veritable de-industrialisation in which manufacturing employment has fallen from 195,000 in 1950 to just over 100,000 in 1990. We now have what one commentator called a 'workhouse economy' where employment is based on people servicing, administering, controlling and repressing each other at the behest of the British state which subsidises the whole workhouse to the tune of 3-4 billion pounds a year. Clearly the Northern state is an economic failure too.

It's one thing to describe symptoms of failure and another to diagnose its cause. Irish nationalists and republicans see in the economic failure of both states the failure of partition. However the fact that it is both states which have failed shows that without also changing the economic forces which created the failure a new political superstructure will make little difference. A united Ireland, no matter how democratic, that does not challenge and change the capitalist dynamics of the economy will not offer a solution to the economic and social blight facing working people.

In rejecting the nationalist case most socialists who have not capitulated to 'free market' economics state simply that Ireland's problem is capitalism. They proceed as if Irish capitalism was like any other, going no further than to explain the problems affecting every capitalist society and to throw in a few statistics to show that these apply to Ireland. What these statistics show however is that there is something very particular about Irish capitalism. The socialist Kieran Allen has presented an analysis ("**Is Southern Ireland a neo-colony?**") which does attempt to justify this starting point. Unfortunately in attempting to prove that Ireland is not dominated by imperialism he is left with the conclusion that it is just another smaller, weaker and more open version of any other capitalist economy in Western Europe. Ironically this is the same evaluation as that of the majority of bourgeois economic 'experts'.

Were it not for the massive flow of emigration from Ireland this judgment would provoke derision. In effect it is an analysis that

depends on the massive emigration characteristic of both states just as much as the two economies themselves do. It is only by understanding the precise way that capitalism works in Ireland that we can understand its complete failure even in comparison with other European countries. By any such comparison - unemployment, living standards, growth etc. the Irish economy has fallen short.

It is only by understanding that the Irish economy is a semi-colonial one that we can understand how it works and how it has failed. Kieran Allen rejects this because he is afraid that this would entail agreeing with those who see the problem as 'foreign' control of 'Irish' wealth and therefore see struggle in purely nationalist terms and not in terms of Irish workers versus Irish bosses. He is afraid that Irish workers would have to side with Irish bosses if Ireland was shown to be dominated by imperialism. Ironically this is how Irish republicans, who he hopes to criticise, see the problem.

Semi-Colonial

Many points could be made about this type of analysis. It starts not from trying to understand the real world but from reconstructing it to fit into a preconceived argument. We can only hope that when the Socialist Workers Party, to which Kieran Allen belongs, realises that Ireland is a semi-colonial country it will not feel obliged to unite with Irish capitalism. Understanding that Irish capitalism is dominated by imperialist capitalism does not mean that we have to side with it. It means that the task of socialists is to lead Irish workers against both native and foreign capital while correctly appreciating in what combination they are linked.

It is not enough to establish that Ireland is dependent on the world market through trade, which imperialist countries and their multi-nationals dominate (it has been estimated that 70%-80% of world trade is intra-firm trade within the same multi-national company), to prove the semi-colonial character of the 26 county economy. However the 26 counties is, more than most, dependent on trade in the world market to survive. In 1990 imports plus exports were 130% of Gross National Product (G.N.P.) while in the US they were only 18% and only 47% and 57% in Britain and Germany. This is undoubtedly a constraining factor

which would become clear very rapidly were Ireland to have a socialist revolution and attempt a socialist mode of development.

It is however true that the globalisation of production and trade has made every country dependent to a greater or lesser extent on the world market. There is not, and cannot be, a purely national Irish development; 'Sinn Fein' economics belong to a bygone era. It's not a matter of whether but how a country is inserted into the world market that determines whether it is semi-colonial and dominated by imperialism.

This should not be understood as a purely external feature of the economy. It determines the whole internal structure; and understanding how the economy is semi-colonial helps us understand how it works and why Ireland is not an example of a 'standard' capitalist economy (which in any case does not exist).

In semi-colonial countries it is the capital exports of the imperialist countries which are more important to the accumulation of capital than the internally generated process of accumulation. Imperialist capital tends to have primacy so that in general only investment that is complementary to imperialism takes place and not that which is competitive with it.

The sheer scale and size of the leading companies and banks centered in a small number of imperialist states is so overwhelming that few companies from emerging countries can hope to rise to world status. It is estimated that some 35,000 multinationals, on a broad definition of the term, control 170,000 affiliates around the globe. Of these, the top 400 account for over £3 trillion of world assets. The 'Economist' magazine calculates that the top 100 control about 16% of the world's productive assets, and the top 300 close to a third, a truly astounding figure. Uneven world development means that several hundred giant monopolies now bestride the global economy, able to exercise a pervasive influence over patterns of world trade.

This does not signify any lessening of competition but its intensification. Competition in the consumer durables sector is between five companies who control 70% of the world market. A similar number carve up 60% of world air travel; five aerospace companies control over half the world's production of aircraft while the same tiny number

dominate its electronic components industry; five carve up at least half the world's personal computer production; five over 40% of global media and five a third of chemical production etc. etc. A number of private companies now have greater command over financial resources than does the Irish state and its entire economy. The G.D.P. of the southern economy is just over £30 billion but the market value of General Motors is around £115 billion and Exxon and I.B.M. around £55 billion each.

An examination of the history and present structure of the Irish economy shows the evidence of a semi-colonial pattern of development. Even Kieran Allen admits that Ireland's underdevelopment at the time of partition was due to imperialism: "**The Irish economy was shaped in Britain's interests.**" Nor does he, rightly, believe that the 26 county economy developed out of its semi-colonial position through the "economic war" of the 1930's. Instead he dates the escape from the opening up of the Southern economy after 1958. In other words he would have us believe that the 26 counties escaped from semi-colonial status through opening up to multi-national exploitation and at the same time as the growth of a massive national debt, much of it owed to outside imperialist interests. In part this obvious nonsense is the result of wrongly identifying imperialist control solely with Britain, which again mirrors republican misconceptions about imperialism. The long term decline of Britain has meant a greater weight for other imperialisms but it has not meant escape from it altogether. Even the 26 counties specific reliance on Britain is underestimated by Allen. The massive devaluation of the punt inside the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (E.R.M.) at the start of 1993 exploded what he thought was proof of the South's escape from British imperialism.

Industrial Development

If we turn from history to the present structure of the Irish economy we can see perfectly clearly its semi-colonial character. Firstly even Allen agrees that any industrialisation that has taken place is due to: "**the motor of multi-national investment**" ["Is Southern Ireland a neo-colony?" p.41].

Thus while the average annual real growth rate for all industry between 1960 and 1985 was 5.6%, for foreign industry it was 18.4% and for the rest only 3.6%. This latter growth rate is not bad by international standards, but when it is seen as the result of a massive and unsustainable explosion of the national debt it can be seen for what it is - weak and vulnerable.

Imperialist multinationals accounted for more than 35% of manufacturing employment by the mid 80's and as much as 70% of manufactured exports on which, as we have seen, the 26 counties is so dependent to provide the foreign currency to pay for its imports and debt servicing. Today more than ever, despite repeated official reports recommending less reliance on multinational capital for employment, the south continues to be heavily reliant on foreign capital for jobs. In 1995 the I.D.A. sponsored 11,500 new jobs in the multinational sector, twice the level of 10 years before, securing 14% of all greenfield manufacturing investment in Europe. If imperialist capital is, even by Allen's definition, the motor of industrial development, then it fits our description of the importance of imperialist capital in a semi-colonial economy. What of indigenous industry?

The opening of the 26 county market to outside competition has seen weak Irish owned industry go into, first relative decline, and then into absolute decline. Thus by 1985 the level of indigenous manufacturing employment was probably lower than at any time since the 1940's, falling from 177,000 in 1954 to 114,000 in 1987. While during the '80's foreign industry lost jobs, native industry, unable to compete in world markets and increasingly unable to compete in its own market, lost jobs at an even faster rate - over 25% down during the decade.

This failure is testimony to the weak and subordinate character of Irish capital and the failure is actually worse than the figures would indicate. The growth in the domestic market caused by the growth in the national debt allowed the mushrooming of small non-traded Irish firms which concealed the decline of the older and larger firms in the traded sector. (By 'traded' we mean those industrial sectors which can produce for export and thereby compete, at whatever level, with imperialist firms on the world market.) The opening up of the economy led to the elimination of many of these firms and showed that, far from signalling an end to the semi-colonial character of the economy, it strengthened the subor-

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dination of Irish capitalism to imperialism.

The Irish industry which has been left has been concentrated in relatively low growth sectors involving processing of primary resources [such as food], low value added production, or involved in sectors which are naturally sheltered from foreign competition or require local linkages (such as printing and packaging). This has left a technologically backward industrial structure in which, for example, no capital goods sector has been created. The average size of indigenous firms has declined and no advanced industries requiring large economies of scale have been created. As one author put it:

“By the late 1970's, therefore, native Irish industry still had the sort of structure associated more with less developed countries than with advanced industrial economies.” [Eoin O'Malley; "Industry and economic development"].

The officially sponsored Culliton report recorded the same weakness:

“We were disheartened to find that after an expenditure of many millions of pounds of state grants over the last twenty years, there are still only twenty Irish companies employing 500 people or more and only 150 Irish owned companies with sales of IR£5 million or more.”

Increasingly pushed back on its own domestic market, Irish industry's ability to compete internationally is poor. The largest and second largest Irish firms, Smurfit and Cement Roadstone, exported only around 4% of sales at the end of the 1970's.

The net effect of this history and structure of southern capitalism is to block extensive and cumulative industrialisation. Irish industry is narrowly based and many of the largest firms erected during the period of protectionism have been destroyed. The growth of small-scale industry was likewise dependent on a massive growth of the national debt which could not be sustained and cumulative industrialisation through the multi-nationals is a non-starter. Most are only temporary visitors to Ireland and the lack of linkages with local firms means they do little to develop local industry.

It is the exceptions which prove the rule. One exception is those long

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established Irish industries which are able to compete internationally - for example Guinness. They however were set up before the imperialist age of world capitalism and therefore before imperialism began to use capital exports to dominate the world market. These firms are now nearly all non-Irish owned.

The second exception are those very few Irish firms which have made it big such as Cement Roadstone. These have grown big not by furthering the industrialisation of Ireland but by acquisition overseas. This simply reflects the lack of profitable investment opportunities in productive ventures available inside a typical semi-colonial economy and also explains the attraction of government stock for Irish money, the outflow from the economy of multi-national profits and the 40% of pension fund money invested abroad. The Industrial Development Authority estimates that 75%-80% of profits from foreign multinationals leave the country (£3.8 billion in 1994). When combined with over £2 billion which leaves the 26 counties to service the foreign debt it is easy to see how imperialism and its local satraps suck the wealth from Irish workers.

This leads to an important characteristic of the semi-colonial economy in the 26 counties - the divergence that exists between income produced and the income retained in the domestic economy. There is a 12 -14% difference between Gross National Product (G.N.P.)and Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.). The latter rose by 29% between 1980 and 1989 yet G.N.P. rose by only 14.5% in the same period. Regularly 1/8 th of income disappears. It is G.N.P. which is obviously key since it is this which measures the wealth retained in the country.

In the North a narrow and overspecialised industrialisation took place around Belfast which was incapable of responding to the vagaries of the world market. It too has been totally dependent on multinationals for industrial growth. Only 8.5% of all industrial jobs promoted during the period 1947-67 were in Northern Irish companies. Since then the multinationals have left and de-industrialisation has proceeded apace. Manufacturing employment has fallen from 180,000 in 1970 to only 105,000 in 1990, a fall of 42%. A non-sustaining industrial development has left (just like the South) a private sector dependent on state support. Government grants and subsidies were equivalent to 25% of manufacturing output between 1973 and 1986. The 26 county

national debt is mirrored by the 6 counties dependence on the subvention of the British state.

In the last analysis, from a Marxist viewpoint, underdevelopment is always underemployment both quantitatively (massive unemployment) and qualitatively (low productivity of labour). The scale of the first has been disguised by massive emigration from both states. That Irish industry is characterised by low productivity is clear. Manufacturing productivity is around 75% of Britain in both states and Britain is hardly a world leader. In the 26 counties in the mid 1980's net output per person was £42,500 in foreign owned manufacturing industry but only £17,000 in indigenous firms. Two authors, Bob Rowthorn and Naomi Wayne in "Northern Ireland, the political economy of conflict" have estimated the North's productive capacity per capita as " about equal to that of a Latin American country like Argentina or Mexico".

Among the political consequences of understanding the semi-colonial character of the 26 counties is appreciating that the southern capitalist class is small and relatively weak and that its representatives are not in a position of equality with imperialist capital and its representatives. This does not mean they thereby have some interest in challenging imperialism. Far from it. Precisely because they are not a strong and independent fraction of the world capitalist class they are in no position to compete with or challenge imperialist fractions of the same class. Neither does this make them 'oppressed'. It just means that they are junior and not equal partners in the exploitation and oppression which the imperialist system creates. They are no less our enemies.

Failed Policies

Socialists need a coherent analysis of the failure of Irish capitalism because without it the working class is disarmed in front of the arguments of the capitalists and their experts (the economists and newspaper leader writers) who argue that it is the working class who are to blame and they who should pay.

These experts have argued that our only hope is in our being 'competitive' on the world market - which means accepting lower wages and less social provision. Unemployment is the fault of workers pricing them-

selves out of jobs and emigration inevitable given 'our' propensity to 'pay ourselves' too much. Finally there are too many people in the country anyway. Other than that the 'fundamentals' of the economy are sound.

Taking the last point first, the fundamentals of the economy are obviously not sound unless one means the highest profits in Europe for US multinationals or the bankers who profit from the national debt. The most important point however, is that workers must reject any responsibility for the economic crisis and the argument that we need to work harder and accept lower wages and welfare in order to stay competitive. Irish workers have increased productivity by over 60% in the last 20 years and real unit labour costs have fallen by 14.2% since 1980 - double the decrease for all E.U. countries - but the increased profits they have produced have not gone to develop the economy. Instead they have been exported or invested in government debt or other speculation. In Ireland's semi-colonial society this process is greatly magnified as we have seen.

Instead of providing the road to prosperity competition on the world market has destroyed much of Irish industry, led to the massive debt that soaks up our income tax and leaves us open to the fly-by night exploitation of the multinationals. There is no way Irish workers can lower their wages to 'compete' with the super exploited of Shanghai or Hong Kong where £200 a year is the going wage. What good has it done workers in these countries to be 'competitive'? In fact it is the countries with the highest wages that have relatively lower unemployment - for example Denmark, Holland and Austria. Lower wages would not lead to more jobs but to;

- Lower demand for home industry leading to job losses.
- Increased profits which would not be reinvested but exported or speculated.
- A narrower tax base for welfare provision.

Finally the argument that there are too many people in the country would be laughable were it not for the tragic origin of Ireland's unique history of population decline through famine, poverty and emigration. In fact if even the 26 counties had the same population density as the

E.U. average it would have a population of 12 1/2 million instead of 3 1/2 million.

In reality we do not even need these arguments. The policy advocated by the experts of the right has been in operation for the last 35 years and it has failed. Irish wages North and South are already low by European standards yet where are the thousands of unskilled low paid jobs which it is said workers are pricing themselves out of? They don't exist. The policy of throwing money after multinationals and Irish capitalists in order to create jobs has been recognised even by its advocates as one without a future. In the 26 counties during the 1990's grants and tax concessions costing over £4 1/2 billion were paid out resulting in only 7,000 more jobs at the end of the decade - over 1/2 million a job! In the North the story is exactly the same. During the 1980's the two local development agencies, the Industrial Development Board (I.D.B.) and the Local Enterprise Development Unit (L.E.D.U.) spent £1 billion and manufacturing employment actually fell by 42,000. In 1991-92 the I.D.B. promoted a grand total of 80 jobs - and 'promoted' does not even mean that the jobs were actually created.

If the past and the present of this competitive market strategy have failed, the future looks even worse. The project of an E.U. Single European market relies on the largest of Europe's companies destroying the smallest and growing powerful enough to compete with the largest of American and Japanese companies. In this strategy Irish capitalism has little or no role, and can only continue to decline even beyond the 0.7% of E.U. manufacturing output which it currently accounts for. In this scheme the semi-state sector will be a particular target as we have already indicated. A proposal is already circulating to float 49% of C.I.E. on the international stock market. Bord Telecom after reducing its workforce from 21,000 in 1979 to 12,700 is to be 'slimmed down' by another 2,000. This to make it ripe for take-over by one of the big international giants. At E.S.B. a ruthless team of private consultants from the U.S. is planning a 'rationalisation' which could lead to future privatisation. They have already proposed reducing the workforce by 3,000 and advised bringing in private cheap labour contract firms to take over many areas of work. There can be little doubt that the Irish capitalists, supported no doubt by the Labour and Trade Union bureaucracies, are ready to sell workers in the semi-state sector to as many anti-union multinationals as they can get away with. There

are 25 state controlled economic units employing around 75,000 people, worth about 8% of G.D.P., which when put up for sale would be available for gambling on the worlds stock markets.

The strategy of attracting multinationals is also increasingly endangered as the E.U., through its 'Fortress Europe' strategy, begins to put restrictions on US multinationals setting up within Europe in an attempt to get around trade barriers. Ireland faces increasing competition as a site for such mobile direct investments from Eastern Europe - and even from Britain - fast attempting to become the sweat shop of Europe. Finally demands to reduce the national debt and balance the budget threaten even greater unemployment.

Even in agriculture the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (G.A.T.T.) process allied to the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (C.A.P.) spells harder times for small farmers and farm workers especially. Hailed as the get rich quick solution to Irish agricultural problems, price and income rises after the first few years of E.U. membership had, for the average family farm, by 1980 been transformed into an income below that prevailing when Ireland joined the E.U. And now most farmers are deeply in debt.

C.A.P. has played a pivotal role in the relationship between Imperialism and Ireland and has provided a small layer of big ranchers with a set of privileges denied to most of the world's semi-colonial farmers. The European Farm Fund accounts for 75% of E.U. transfers to Ireland and access is gained to the European market at prices more favourable than the traditional British one. But E.U. price supports discriminate in favour of large farms. The National Farm Survey estimated that between 1984 and 1991 there was a nominal increase in farm income of some 30%. However the top one third experienced an 85% increase while the smallest farmers experienced a decline of 58%. In the North 30% of farms account for 70% of production, while in the South 25% account for 75% of output. Concentration and overspecialisation in production has been promoted by the E.U. as the way forward for agriculture, just as it has for industry, resulting in five large firms dominating prices on the Irish market - Kerry, Waterford, Dairygold and Golden Vale. While large by Irish standards they would be ripe for take-over by international firms in any period of crisis. Growing unemployment is the result of these policies. In the North agricultural

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employment fell by 17% between 1973 and 1985 - in the south it fell 35%, 100,000 between 1973 and 1987.

Given this abject history of failure and the resulting misery inflicted on Ireland's working people, it is a measure of the complete misleadership of the Trade Union movement and the leaderships of the Irish Labour party and Democratic Left that they have been unable to put forward an alternative. Of course this is not how it is presented.

Peter Cassells, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (I.C.T.U.) has said that; "**the time is now ripe in Ireland for a radical new departure in our approach to formulating economic policy**" ("The Jobs Crisis - Thomas Davis lectures"). But what does this radical new departure consist of? Apparently we need "**creative capitalism..... we need an entrepreneurial revolution in this country.**" He gives the biggest Irish companies as examples to show "**what can be done**". Yes the same companies that get rich exploiting Irish workers and then export their profits out of Ireland to screw workers elsewhere! He calls for partnership with the employers and the state. In fact the I.C.T.U. 'alternative' has ended up being denounced as "**crude monetarism**" by John Bruton!

Socialists have to reject this capitulation. Capitalism has failed. Instead of partnership we need workers organised to defend themselves against employer and government attacks. We don't need a capitalist revolution. We need a socialist revolution!

Socialist Solution

Socialists have to win again the argument that it is capitalism which is wasteful and inefficient. The "yuppie" financier is portrayed as the pinnacle of capitalist achievement, but the parasitical growth of employment around the world in financial services jobs is testimony, not to the dynamism of capitalism, but to its increasing inability to develop employment in productive occupations which actually create wealth instead of laundering it around the world's stock market casinos.

Unemployment, food mountains, bankrupt and idle factories, unused

capacity and unsold goods, monopoly control of new technology and wasteful duplication are all inescapable attributes of capitalism.

As we have said it is fashionable to object that the socialist alternative of planning leads to bureaucracy, totalitarianism and inefficiency and the example of the Soviet Union is always raised. In fact, as we have also explained, this argument is flawed both historically and logically. Historically it was bureaucracy in Russia which led to Stalinist centralised planning - a bureaucracy which grew rapidly during the period of the New Economic Policy which saw widespread development of the market so beloved of the right. Planning is no more intrinsically bureaucratic than capitalism is democratic, and most capitalist countries in the world do not even have the facade that passes for democracy in the advanced capitalist countries.

Planning is necessary because only when the economy is consciously planned can production break with the logic of profit to an alternative based on the needs of working people. This means that the working class must have its own forum to discuss and debate how such a plan can be constructed. Far from being centralised and bureaucratic real planning requires the fullest participation and widest knowledge on the part of the working class so it can take full control of production and distribution. The objectives of the plan would be to create full employment, eradicate poverty and homelessness by unleashing the creative capacities of working people. The wastefulness of capitalism which we have exposed shows that the resources to achieve these aims are available. Socialists should demand that those who presently represent the working class should take the lead in developing such a plan as an alternative to the failed market policies of the capitalist parties. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions should unite all working people - not just in trade unions but the unemployed and communities - to discuss and develop a workers plan for Ireland. Of course the present leadership will refuse and it is the duty of socialists to fight for a new leadership that will.

In order to develop and implement such a plan it would be necessary to unlock the business secrets of the economy and take control of the levers of power. This would require a revolution involving nationalising under workers control the financial and banking institutions of the country worth around £80 billion. Capital controls would have to be

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introduced to ensure that Irish capitalists or imperialists could not sabotage the creation of a democratic and socialist economy. Control of the financial institutions would stem the flood tide of money which is exported from the country. In 1990 for example foreign industry exported £2 billion of profits and dividends while a similar amount was exported as private outflows, the profit and investment of Irish capitalists.

The national debt is not just an economic drain but a political weapon of control by imperialism and local capitalists to ensure the good behaviour of any Irish government. There could therefore be no question of accepting or even rescheduling this debt which was contracted by the capitalists of Ireland and not by the workers and which would already have been paid off where it not for capitalist interest. It must therefore be cancelled so that the resources it consumes, around 7% of GNP, can be devoted to reconstructing the economy.

Control of finance and nationalisation of large scale industry would give the working class the levers of power to enforce planning agreements on the rest of the economy which remains privately owned. This private industry would be compelled to recognise trade unions, open its books and pay proper taxes instead of the tiny corporation taxes which are presently levied. The massive amounts spent on subsidising private profits would be ended. Planning agreements with private industry would be entered into to ensure that production in the private sector did not conflict with the national plan. Those companies trying to undermine the plan or declaring redundancies would be nationalised under workers control.

Agriculture would have its own plan which would be aimed not just at developing production but at ensuring a rounded development of rural areas and stemming emigration from the countryside. This could only be achieved by nationalisation of the large ranches and food processors and support for small farmers who continue to want to work the land.

Socialisation of the Irish economy would remove the destructive power of the capitalist market at the national level but could not extricate Ireland from the pressures of the world market. There can be no question of a purely national development which, if it failed in a

continental sized group of countries like the Soviet Union, could not hope to succeed in a tiny country like Ireland. Is then a socialist Ireland doomed to failure?

Repudiation of Irish capitalism's debt already limits the power of imperialism. A plan which recognises the necessity for trade to be under state control would ensure that it took place only on terms which supported the objectives of the workers state and did not undermine it. The pursuit on international links under these terms would help to minimise the problems created by a purely national plan.

In reality however the internationalisation of the Irish economy would present enormous problems almost immediately, way beyond the loss of the British subvention to the North or E.U. transfers (which in any case will not continue). We have made clear that as part of the European Union even the smallest measures necessary to create a just and fair economy would be illegal under E.U. rules. This in itself exposes the deception that the E.U. represents some force for progressive social change. Instead the E.U. would immediately become a mechanism for attempting to rein in socialist measures inside the country. The E.U. transfers would immediately be withheld on the promise of 'good behaviour' in the future. These amounts however are not decisive given the large amounts which leave Ireland as a result of debt repayment and profit outflows. E.U. money has flowed from the working class of the 'rich' capitalist countries to the rich of the 'poor' ones. It has been a class redistribution as much as a geographical one.

A newly formed workers state would use the institutions of the E.U. as a forum to present international agreements which would benefit Irish and European workers. It would provide a platform to appeal to the European working class for a Europe-wide plan to eliminate unemployment and poverty across the continent. We would urge rejection of the schemes of big capital such as Maastricht and expose the hollowness of the 'social Europe'. Rather as socialists use capitalist parliaments we would use the institutions of the E.U. to urge its destruction and the creation of a genuine democracy, which could only exist with workers control of production across the continent. We would appeal to workers around the world to help us stop the inevitable attacks of imperialist capital and its governments on the new state, an appeal

which would have special relevance to the workers of multinationals which operate in Ireland.

In the last analysis the future of a workers state in Ireland would depend on successful revolutions elsewhere in the major imperialist countries. Because of its semi-colonial nature large - scale efficient industry does not exist for Irish workers to take over , so a new Irish workers state would be that much weaker. However a successful international solidarity movement with the Irish revolution would play a vital, if not a decisive, role in extending the life of a socialist revolution in Ireland, giving time for the extension of the revolution to other countries. The Irish diaspora could play an important role in such a movement.

There are no technical obstacles to the Irish working class taking control of the economy, and the resources exist to create a just and fair society which would eliminate poverty and inequality. The only obstacles are political and the biggest political obstacle are those in the workers movement who cling to capitalism and say socialism is not possible. They must be pushed aside as the first step to the new society.

4.

The National Question

Ireland suffers not only from semi-colonialism but also from an unresolved national question. The Irish working class was formed and developed in a nation controlled by a foreign government which ruled by a mixture of repression, sectarian division and reforms imposed from above. Rule by the British state has never been accepted as legitimate by the majority of the Irish people and when they have rejected this rule the British state has employed threats and violence to ensure its continued domination. All three means of protecting its rule were employed to enforce partition, a 'carnival of reaction' as the socialist James Connolly correctly predicted, which created two artificial and undemocratic states.

Today the same mixture of repression, sectarianism and reforms from above are used to maintain British rule in the north. The northern states very justification for existence is a sectarian head-count which can impose itself only by continuous repression of the catholic minority. Limited reforms have been introduced in response to the rebellion

of the nationalist population but these reforms can never become the primary or dominant mechanism for the states survival. This remains, and can only remain, sectarian division and violence. The northern state will not and cannot be a 'normal' bourgeois democracy, even within the very elastic definition of this concept, with any sort of general and broad legitimacy. This is why socialists characterise the northern state as irreformable.

In the 26 counties the capitalist state enjoys an authority and acceptance which rivals that of many west European capitalist states. The 'normal' mechanisms of legitimising capitalism and the capitalist state are much more important in ensuring the stable functioning of the southern state and its semi-colonial economy. Even in the south however the legitimacy conferred on the state is incomplete. Unity of the nation remains the aspiration of the vast majority of the working class and the Irish people. It is the British state and its occupation of part of the country which is the fundamental obstacle to this unity and independence.

In summation Ireland is an oppressed nation and this oppression is of cardinal importance to socialists and the development of a socialist programme for the Irish working class.

Self-Determination

For socialists there can only be one programmatic response to national oppression and that is self-determination for the oppressed nation, immediate withdrawal of the British Army and disbandment of the repressive forces of the Northern state. That these fundamental democratic demands have been rejected by the majority of 'socialists' in both Ireland and Britain is testimony only to the counterfeit and treacherous nature of what passes itself as socialism in both countries. Even among the revolutionary left there is a tendency to wish the question away in favour of what are seen as 'class' issues. But self-determination is a class issue. It is a class issue because it is a fundamental question which the working class must face on its road to conquering power and establishing socialism. Lenin understood the importance of the national question and it is worth quoting him at length for this reason:

“In the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practice full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.”

Again:

“It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from socialist revolution...”

Self-determination does not pose the question of workers power and a workers state. It is a democratic demand pointing to the fullest democracy, creating the optimum conditions for the working class struggle for power. This does not mean that the struggle for socialism must be relegated to after the success of the democratic struggle. It means that both must be combined in a recognition that one will never be realised without the other.

Socialists who reject self-determination or seek to relegate its importance in an oppressed country like Ireland in effect counterpose socialism to democracy and whatever their intentions, support national oppression and the nationalism of the oppressor state. Avoiding or fudging political issues while promoting purely economic ones which are seen as ‘pure’ class issues is a feature of many socialist organisations. They thereby surrender these questions to the capitalist class leaving workers open to capitalist solutions. Socialism offers a global alternative to capitalism, not just at the place of production and purely workers vs. bosses, ‘class issues’

What do we mean by self-determination?

“It means that ‘self-determination of nations’ in the Marxist programme cannot, from a historic-economic point of view, have any other meaning than political self-determination, state independence, and the formation of a national state.” (Lenin)

This means that:

“The domination of finance capital and of capital in general is not to be abolished by any reforms in the sphere of political democracy, and self-determination belongs wholly and exclusively to this sphere.”

“The domination of finance capital, however, does not in the least nullify the significance of political democracy as a freer, wider and clearer form of class oppression and class struggle.” (Lenin)

This means that self-determination would not end the imperialist exploitation and domination of Ireland which we have explained. It does not go beyond bourgeois democracy and the republican programme of self-determination and ‘national democracy’ cannot end imperialist exploitation of the country.

Left republicans have quoted Connollys’ dictum that the cause of labour is the cause of Ireland and the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. But the two are not identical. Those who struggle for self-determination are not by that fact somehow also struggling for socialism. In practice this has only been a left cover for republicans traditional policy of ‘labour must wait.’ The needs of the working class and the possibilities for socialism are always postponed to after national freedom in order to seek national unity with the middle class and bourgeoisie. Socialists completely reject this. The class struggle is not postponed by any national struggle and socialists must never cease to prosecute it in favour of the working class.

Republicans also cite the correct socialist principle that we must distinguish between the nationalism of the oppressed and the nationalism of the oppressor. Unfortunately they also go on to assume that socialists must therefore become supporters of the nationalism of the oppressed. Socialists do not support any nationalism, even the nationalism of an oppressed nation.

“The bourgeois nationalism of an oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression and it is this content that we unconditionally support.” (Lenin)

In so far as the struggle against British rule is a struggle against oppression and for democracy socialists are fully behind it. Indeed seek to lead it. In so far as it posits a separate nation state as the solution to the problems of Irish workers and oppressed we vigorously oppose it. Nationalism offers no solution to the working class. To repeat, socialists support national struggles of the oppressed for the following reasons:

1. Because it is a fight against oppression and for democracy in which socialists must take sides. It is a struggle for equality and against the national privileges of the oppressor nation which claims for itself the right to unity and independence but denies it to others. Such a fight is as necessary for the working class of the oppressor nation as for the oppressed. A nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free because its own existence is not based on democracy but on injustice and oppression which can as easily be expressed within the the oppressor nation as without. The working class of the oppressor nation must break with the national chauvinism of its own ruling class before it can establish its own class independence.

2. Because a democratic solution to national struggles i.e.. self-determination, is the only basis for real and lasting workers unity. It is only possible to unite workers of different countries around democracy. Forced unity, that is the unity resulting from imperialist conquest, is no sort of workers unity at all. Self-determination for socialists is therefore not a mechanism for division but a recognition of the only free and democratic way to achieve workers unity across nations.

Internationalism

Socialists are internationalists. Capitalism is, and is ever more becoming, an international system. Its oppression and exploitation is international and it can only be defeated on an international level. Only when workers recognise the fellow worker of a foreign country as an ally and the capitalist of their own country as an enemy can socialism be achieved. This means a rejection of all nationalist solutions and nationalist ideologies which no matter how progressive recognise nationality as the primary and legitimate division of society.

Internationalism is a vital weapon for the working class which must reject all calls for sacrifices 'for the national interest', behind which lies only the interests of the capitalist class. By supporting only the democratic content of an oppressed nations struggle socialists do not echo republican calls for the Irish bourgeoisie represented by parties like Fianna Fail or the middle class SDLP to be true to their proclaimed nationalism and stand up against imperialism. Socialists should certainly denounce these parties for betraying the democratic aspirations of the Irish people to unity and independence which they claim to represent, but we do not explain this in terms of them being insufficiently nationalist. Their opposition to democracy is a function of their class interests and so is their nationalism. The basic problem with these parties is not their lack of nationalism but their support for the capitalist system. Catholic church control and censorship, 'social partnership' between bosses and workers, and support for capitalist parties like Fianna Fail are all justified at least partly in nationalist terms.

Of course a purely national road to development in Ireland is totally unrealistic. For the Irish capitalist class nationalism and the nation state are not so much a road to the creation of a national market within which they can be protected and grow but a mechanism for legitimising their rule and encouraging multinational investment and European handouts. This project has failed and we have demonstrated the dimensions of the failure.

Human emancipation can only be achieved when national differences become politically irrelevant and disappear. This does not mean cultural uniformity but a mixing and diversity of cultures which privileges no one culture above another. Socialists do not therefore privilege Irish culture over any other even though it is oppressed. We defend it from attack and discrimination and support its right to exist as an enrichment of human culture generally but we do not say it is a 'better' culture than any other. There is, however, a struggle within the various forms of cultural expression in Ireland. Clerical reaction has sought to control every manifestation of Irish culture; literature, music, page 52

dance etc. We of course oppose all such attempts to impose a straightjacket on cultural life.

The Protestants

Without this approach to national movements, which judges them according to their democratic content and not on their own terms, it is impossible to correctly orient to the Protestant population.

Originating as a colonial settlement whose purpose was to secure foreign rule, their separate existence as a political community distinct from the rest of the Irish people has been assured by continuing religious discrimination. Their function in justifying and enforcing partition shows that this role as a support for imperialism has not changed. Despite the creation of a separate Northern Ireland state with wide local powers and 70 years to create a national identity no such Protestant nationality has been created. The Protestants of Ireland are not a separate nation. Unable to unambiguously define themselves as British, Irish, Northern Irish or as an 'Ulster' nationality they are certain of their identity as Protestants. Defining themselves in negative terms to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Irish people they can identify themselves only in a sectarian manner because only sectarianism has given them a separate and superior economic and political power in relation to the rest of the Irish nation.

This explains why there is no democratic content to the demand for Protestant self-determination. In fact the Protestant population has never demanded self-determination, just the means and the support of imperialism to maintain their sectarian position. The argument for self-determination raised now on their behalf is an attempt to claim some democratic credentials for their reactionary and pro-imperialist historical role.

What does self-determination for the Protestants mean? It at once defines nationality in sectarian terms and condemns Catholics within the Protestant 'nation' to second class citizenship. It would confirm a 'catholic Irish nation' to an analogous, though less brutal, sectarian existence. It means rejection of the non-sectarian principle enshrined in the demand for self-determination which declares the possibility of

both religious groups living together and jointly determining their own national state. In practice it is only a device for imperialist control and a means to thwart the self-determination of an oppressed nation.

There are no arguments which can give it democratic validity. 'Self-determination for Northern Ireland' is in effect the same thing since the northern state is simply the largest area which could command a secure Protestant majority. No minority problem is solved since the purpose of the northern state is to defend minority privilege and in turn oppress a larger proportion of Catholics inside the the north than the Protestants would be in a united Ireland.

For all these reasons socialists are opposed to the northern state, to all notions of Protestant self-determination and to the unionist and loyalist ideologies which have led the Protestant working class. The poverty and violence which has characterised the history of the northern state has scarred Protestant workers as well as Catholic, their marginal privileges notwithstanding. Unionism and loyalism which defends this history offers nothing but the same in the future. Protestant workers must reject this legacy and embrace a democratic and socialist vision of the future.

This is what the socialist programme offers. For most Protestant workers acceptance of this programme poses an enormous challenge because it rejects almost everything which makes the Protestant population a separate political community. But by this very fact it offers a complete liberation from the politics of fear, bigotry and imperialist triumphalism.

Rejection of Protestant self-determination does not mean rejection of the need for minority rights in a separate Irish state. Socialists do recognise the legitimate concerns of Protestant workers given the role of the catholic church in the 26 county state. Unfortunately the sometimes sincere demand to respond to these fears leads many socialists to, in effect, support Protestant sectarianism. Thus the demand for 'unity by consent' is simply a restatement of the unionist veto, itself a form of sectarian privilege, and no more than an attempt to paint a democratic gloss on a thoroughly reactionary position.

Nevertheless promises of a democratic and non-sectarian future Irish republic are meaningless unless the struggle to achieve it in the here and now is also non-sectarian and democratic. Sectarian actions by republicans in the recent past such as a bombing campaign which targeted mainly Protestant towns or the ready acceptance of Protestant civilian casualties which would not have been accepted if they were Catholics, e.g., the Shankill road bombing, and their refusal to confront 100% the reactionary policies of the catholic church must be opposed by socialists now. This is a complicated task which must at the same time affirm the general validity of any genuine republican struggle for self-determination, refuse to pander to Protestant sectarianism and affirm the need for democracy for both Catholic and Protestant workers. Only a socialist leadership of the struggle can assure the success of such a strategy.

The struggle for self-determination for the whole of the Irish people is fundamentally democratic and must be supported. How that self-determination is expressed is itself a matter of struggle. For socialists it is clear that real democracy and equality will only be possible in a workers republic. This is what socialists fight for as the concrete expression of self-determination (without of course giving up unconditional support for the struggle for self-determination whether it makes socialism its goal or not.)

Role of National Question

The role of the national struggle in the Irish revolution is clear in the north. Political struggle revolves around the fight against imperialism. Victory for the struggle would bring tangible benefits to the working class - an end to the occupation of the British army, disbandment of the sectarian repressive forces and the dismantling of the sectarian state. The struggle precisely grew out of a fight over the 'bread and butter' issues which effect workers - housing and jobs etc. In no sense can the struggle for self-determination be seen as a diversion, or irrelevant to workers real concerns. This is so obvious one can only cry out in amazement at those 'socialists' who condemn the national struggle for being about 'flags' and 'symbols.' The national struggle is central to the revolutionary process in the north because self-determination is the only democratic resolution to the political issue which divides the

working class. Unity on any other basis can only be temporary, ignoring the national question or accepting imperialist conquest and the northern state.

From all these considerations follows socialists duty to defend those republicans who fight against imperialism and our defence of the right of the Irish people to take up arms to defend themselves against imperialist conquest and aggression. Socialists cannot demand of the oppressed that they first endorse a socialist programme before they stand beside them in the struggle. Neither can they say that the oppressed can fight back against imperialism but that it is forbidden that they do so with arms despite facing the armed violence of imperialism. If socialists did either of these they would condemn the oppressed to passivity, until of course 'socialists' had 'educated' them on how to fight back. The oppressed would rightly ignore such 'socialists' who would be condemned to isolated criticism of the real class struggle but no involvement in it. This is why socialists unconditionally defend the right of the Irish people to struggle against imperialism and to do so with arms in hand.

This in no way implies political support for the republican movement, ceasefire or no ceasefire. We have clearly explained socialist opposition to all nationalism and nationalist ideologies. Socialists oppose the republicans' strategy of unity with the Irish middle class and bourgeoisie. The search for such alliances has in the past and is currently leading to the betrayal of the struggle for democracy.

Socialists similarly, for sound strategic reasons, oppose any republican militarist campaign which, of necessity confined to a relatively small number of people, is incapable of defeating a militarily much more powerful enemy but which does impose a more and more desperate militarism on the struggle. Indeed so much so that it has been, and even still is, seen as **the** struggle by many republicans, who elevate it to a principle. Not only can it not remove imperialism but it has proved totally incapable of defending catholic workers from either British or loyalist violence. Instead it erects obstacles to the broadening and deepening of the struggle which is the best way to promote defence as well as advancing the struggle.

The republican movement has combined militarism with reformist community politics aimed at 'screwing the system' but not actually

destroying it and erecting a new one. This political combination, while capable of relating to the experience of the most oppressed catholic workers in the north, offers nothing to southern workers at all. Republicans traditional programme of 'Brits out' and declaration that they seek the same objectives as all other 26 county parties - Irish unification - shows they offer nothing more than a 32 county 'Free state.' Republicans are incapable of consistently challenging the southern capitalist class because they seek an alliance with it against imperialism. They offer next to nothing to southern workers and for this reason southern workers have given them next to nothing in return in terms of support.

Different Road

Socialists offer an alternative road in the fight for self-determination. This fight starts from the need of the most oppressed in the northern state to defend themselves by mass action and to reach out for support to the rest of the Irish working class. To do this they need not only a programme which is democratic but a programme which addresses the needs of southern workers. It is here that we really meet the limits of a purely democratic programme.

Despite some impressive upsurges against specific British outrages, the last 25 years have shown that southern workers will not organise and mobilise in a fashion that can destroy the northern state while the struggle in the north relates only to the north. Only a struggle of revolutionary proportions by the southern working class can destroy the northern state and southern workers will not mobilise for revolution around the demand for self-determination, which as we have explained, relates to the right to have one's own state: a right that southern workers have and which, as we have said, in their eyes has not a little legitimacy. (Something republicans were forced to acknowledge when they abandoned abstentionism.) This is related to the fact that most other tasks associated with the democratic revolution have been won in the south-equality under the law, right to vote and organise etc. - although incompletely, as in all capitalist countries. The incompleteness of the democratic revolution, primarily partition, drives the continuing aspiration for a united Ireland among the vast majority of

southern workers but it would be a radical mistake to believe that this aspiration alone will promote southern workers to revolution.

Revolutions are possible when conditions faced by workers are intolerable and not only are the capitalist class incapable of enforcing them but the working class is unwilling to put up with them. It is therefore not conditions in the north that will radicalise the mass of southern workers but conditions they face themselves. The socialist programme in the south must first and foremost address these conditions while explaining the need for southern workers to join the struggle against British rule in the north which is a vital support to the present economic and political system in both Irish states.

The role of the national question in the revolutionary process in the south is therefore different to that in the north. There is no foreign army of occupation and no sectarian state apparatus or religious discrimination to drive the demand for self-determination. It is therefore inconceivable that southern workers will develop a revolutionary leadership or generalised class consciousness out of the struggle in the north and not out of the struggle against their own conditions. These conditions of widespread insecurity and poverty, unemployment, exploitation and emigration have and will force southern workers into struggle out of which can be built a revolutionary leadership. Through these a realisation of the connection between their own conditions and struggles and the struggle in the north can be forged. Here the two separate ideas of imperialist exploitation and national oppression combine.

The specific form of national oppression suffered by Ireland - partition - is the specific political framework and mechanism through which imperialism exploits the whole island. Struggles against economic exploitation cannot be reduced to the 'simple' and 'straightforward' model of class resistance against capitalist exploitation as in say Britain, France or other advanced capitalist countries. As we have shown, the particular character of Ireland's capitalist economy is semi-colonial. This means that the dynamic behind Irish workers exploitation is primarily the needs of imperialism and not the accumulation of capital by Ireland's own capitalist class. This of course does not mean that Irish capitalists do not exploit Irish workers, they are often the worst. It means that the struggle against exploitation inevitably throws

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up the issue of imperialism being the motor of this exploitation because it is the motor of capital accumulation and economic development generally.

An example will demonstrate this. The campaign in the late 1970's against the huge tax burden on the working class could only be understood by recognising that this burden resulted from the need to entice multinational capital by low corporate taxes resulting in it being shouldered by the working class. It was required to pay for the hand-outs and infrastructural development which were intended to further entice these multinationals to locate in Ireland. Once again it must not be forgotten that Irish capital also benefits from this process and that only a socialist programme of transforming the organisations of the working class into fighting instruments, generalising and politicising the fight through transitional demands could hope to lead to victory in this sort of struggle.

In confronting their economic and social exploitation southern workers will confront the semi-colonial character of the economy, but this does not therefore imply that we are involved in a national struggle or that a democratic programme is adequate. Democratic programmes do not provide answers to economic exploitation; political democracy, as Lenin explained, is compatible with capitalist exploitation. To end such exploitation southern workers will be faced first, sooner rather than later, not with a foreign state but with an Irish state hell bent on defending native capitalist and imperialist interests. Irish workers will be pitted against an Irish state and no nationalist or purely democratic programme will offer any strategy for victory in this sort of contest.

As we have seen with the struggle in the north a threat to one partitionist state threatens the stability of both. The struggle against the northern state will inevitably link with the struggle in the south. It is fruitless to speculate on the precise way that they will combine. We can say that for either state to be destroyed a struggle against both is necessary. As the majority of the working class exists in the south it is vital for socialists to understand the dynamic through which southern workers will develop a revolutionary consciousness. This will not come through simple solidarity with the northern struggle, although this will be necessary, but primarily through their own struggles within which the raising of transitional demands can point the way to the

necessity for workers to take control not only of their workplace but also of the state and their country.

Through this the rotten and undemocratic nature of the present Irish state will be revealed and so will its ultimate dependence on imperialism, especially British, which, as in every other previous revolution everywhere in the world, will attempt to intervene to save it. Only in this situation can southern workers fully appreciate the link between their own struggle and that in the north.

Only in this process of combining the struggle for democracy with that for socialism, and not limiting it solely to the north, is there any hope of defeating imperialism and of winning Protestant workers. This does not mean north - south unity first and only then begin to fight to win Protestant workers. It means the two must be combined but with the steadfast principle that such unity can only be based on a programme of consistent democracy and the struggle for revolutionary socialism. Only this programme can unite workers and reach out to the British working class and others for the international solidarity that will be required for victory.

The conclusion is quite clear. No struggle confined to the north will succeed but southern workers will not take on the task of destroying the northern state if all it means is an extension of the one they already live in. The struggle against partition will only become an all Ireland one if it is directed against both rotten states and will only be capable of mobilising the working class if it provides an alternative to the economic and political system in both states.

5.

No to Social Partnership

The socialist analysis of the European Union and the Irish economy is very different from that presented in the mass media. Working people are continually informed that the fundamentals of the economy are sound and that it has the potential to be a 'Celtic Tiger' on the model of the economies of south-east Asia. The European Union, or 'Europe' as it is nearly always called, is the source of all things progressive to the chattering classes.

If there were any doubt which is true, workers have only to consider why, if the economy is so strong, they are continually told to tighten their belt, accept wage restraint, cuts in public services, tax increases and continuing mass unemployment and emigration. Why, if the European Union is the answer, does membership require even greater sacrifices involving privatisation, erosion of working conditions and increased exploitation.

The logic of the bosses and their experts is clear. As workers we must pay ourselves less so that we can earn more. We must work

harder and be more flexible so that we can equal the exploited of the third world and maintain our standard of living compared to them. We must seek higher profits because we are paying ourselves too much. Public services must be cut to pay the national debt but tax amnesties must be given to the rich. Thus the banks, holders of the national debt, must get their pound of flesh and exchange controls relaxed so that the money can be exported, all while the proclaimed policy is to strengthen the native economy. We must strive to be as competitive as possible but waste millions of pounds supporting the high level of the punt which creates higher interest rates and higher uncompetitive prices.

The contradictions could be listed on and on. The arguments are worthless but repeated often enough, as they are, and they become common sense. Unfortunately the worst aspect of these arguments is that not only are they put forward by the bosses and the state but also by the leaders of Ireland's labour movement. The vicious logic of international capitalist competition and the European bureaucratic state is most vociferously supported by the leadership of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Irish Labour Party.

I.C.T.U. bureaucrats support these rotten arguments by proclaiming a new economy based on technology and consensus between workers and management. This has led to the previously unbelievable sight of John Bruton criticising I.C.T.U. for being too monetarist! Now and then the harsh reality behind I.C.T.U.'s new economy of the 21st century is admitted. S.I.P.T.U. bureaucrat Des Geraghty made it lead in an article for the 'Irish Times' that their new system is **"a world in which money makes money, where everyone is expendable and those who control capital have no attachment to any other consideration."** Behind the new buzz words of World Class Manufacturing, Total Quality Management and Just in Time Production lies old fashioned capitalist exploitation. The leaders of Ireland's workers have swallowed this whole and sell it again under the slogan of 'Social Partnership.'

Not Our Crisis

Under this catchphrase workers are urged to pay for the crises which are inherent in the capitalist system and which no amount of sacrifices by workers can avoid. The nature of these crises is illustrated by two

recent struggles at TEAM Aer Lingus and Irish Steel. In both, government and management made two major claims to support their plans. Firstly that there was world wide excess capacity and secondly that the Irish operations were uncompetitive. However both of these are a direct result of how capitalism organises production and not of there being too many overpaid workers.

In a properly organised economy production would be planned to meet the needs of society, to meet necessary demand. In capitalism each individual firm is under no such restriction and tries to capture as large a slice of the market as it can by expanding production and cheapening its products. For any one firm the limit of demand is the whole market and by reducing prices it usually thinks it can increase the market further. For each individual company this may make sense but for the totality of companies and the economy as a whole it is obvious nonsense.

When all or even a large number of companies adopt this strategy the market may indeed increase, at least for a while, and the economy goes through a periodic boom if a similar process effects most major sectors of production. Eventually however, and inevitably, the limits of the overall market are met, whether it be for steel or aeroplanes and it is revealed that too much of each has been produced. Under capitalism it is revealed after production has taken place that too many of certain commodities have been made to meet the available demand and if this takes place on a wide enough scale, as it always does, there is a crisis of overproduction. Workers are then told, as they have in Ireland, that there is overcapacity, as if it was their fault! The full stupidity of the capitalist system is revealed when the massive profits made in the boom can no longer be invested profitably in new production while factories are closed down and workers are laid off. The money is available but the resources are wasted because it is not profitable for capitalism to rationally organise the continuation of production.

The closed factories and laid off workers reduce demand still further creating even greater surplus capacity and when this effects whole sectors of the economy we have a recession. The capitalists gamble the money they have made, but cannot profitably invest, in the stock exchange or on the foreign currency exchanges (speculating against the punt for example) leading to a frenzied round the world chase for profit.

As Des Geraghty says “a world in which money makes money” but nothing else. Workers are blamed for the crisis, and the overcapacity which exists intensifies enormously the competition between surviving companies for a share of the shrinking market. Competition itself only exists because capitalism cannot rationally plan production. Crises of overproduction mean that excess capacity has to be lost through closing production in some firms . When this has been done to a sufficient degree the whole process can start again and the whole economy return to an upturn. The whole idea of competitiveness and therefore of uncompetitiveness is a creation of capitalism. Lack of competitiveness is not the result of workers paying themselves too much but of overproduction and surplus capacity since if exactly enough were produced (in a planned economy) there would be no production which could not find a 'buyer' and thus no crises. No matter what workers get paid and no matter how hard they work capitalism will always produce surplus capacity and crises of overproduction and therefore instances of 'uncompetitiveness.'

The reckless expansion in the boom times is sometimes blamed on bad management. This point was made by TEAM workers in their dispute, but as we have seen this is not the point. For each individual firm expansion is necessary not just for growth but for survival. The only way to ensure that surplus capacity is not developed is to rationally plan production but this requires the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by socialism.

One thing , above all, is clear. The problems of Ireland's economy or of its individual companies are not caused by workers and they should not pay for the faults of capitalism.

Of course this is exactly what the leadership of I.C.T.U. and the Labour Party, not to mention Democratic Left, would have them do. Part of the excuse is that economic problems are too international for workers in one country to do anything about. Instead of drawing the conclusion that they must organise and fight back internationally they put forward the European Union as the answer to economic problems. As we have seen the Maastricht rules are a big part of the problem, not the solution. The drive to deregulation and increasing competition, which only makes crises worse, is the whole point of the European Union. It is

portrayed as a pot of gold but the E.U. is a poisoned chalice.

The much publicised European money is a poor substitute for the ravages of imperialism and the desperate, doomed to failure strategy of trying to become an equal of Germany in a common economic zone. The money from Europe, which during 1989 to 1994 was promised would create 30-35,000 jobs a year has simply been used to keep the state's finances solvent. When it shortly comes to an end the Maastricht rules limiting state borrowing will make the recent deflationary offensive look like a picnic and the Labour Party support for it the sheerest folly. The real future promised by I.C.T.U. bureaucrats is one of a fruitless and unremitting spiral of cuts in workers conditions and living standards which because it cannot change, but only enhance Ireland's semi-colonial status in a crisis ridden economic system, is doomed to failure. But in this case failure is put forward as justification for prescribing more of the same medicine.

The Deals

The medicine has recently been administered through a series of deals made by the bureaucracy of the Trade Unions with successive governments and bosses. It started with the Programme for National Recovery, then the Programme for Economic and Social Progress and then to the Programme for Competitiveness and Work whose very name betrays the complete capitulation of the bureaucracy to the ideology of free market capitalism.

The concrete results, as opposed to the vague promises, of the deals are clear. The P.N.R. saw massive cuts in public services and employment totalling nearly £1R500m. New anti-union legislation was introduced with the blessing of the bureaucracy. The 1990 Industrial Relations Act puts in place restrictions on workers which 10 years of struggle by Thatcher were required to impose on the British Trade Union movement. There are restrictions on secondary picketing and sympathetic strike action which can only be taken with the approval of the I.C.T.U. bureaucracy. Secret ballots must be held before industrial action can be taken and one weeks notice of strike action given. In addition there is the removal of the legal immunity for any liabilities resulting from unofficial action. The legislation is quite clearly put in place to assist the

bureaucracy in policing the rank and file so that it could not defend itself without going through legal hoops, handing the initiative to the bosses and relying on a treacherous leadership for solidarity.

The P.E.S.P. saw the government renege on promised pay rises, begin a programme of privatisation, institute the 'dirty dozen' social welfare cuts and increase taxes through the 1% levy on income tax, taxation of social welfare payments and increases in VAT.

The P.C.W. is the worst of the lot with even vaguer promises of jobs but very real restraints on wages and attacks on jobs and working conditions. The number of strikes has declined dramatically over the last 15 years. The average annual number of days lost dropped from 673,000 in 1977-81 to only 61,000 in 1993. Indeed during the period productivity has increased and unit labour costs have fallen but instead of unemployment decreasing as the government, bosses and their experts predicted, it has increased from 241,000 in 1988 to around 285,000 now with thousands more on useless 'training' schemes or in Britain and America. The partnership and consensus promoted by the bureaucracy has been a one way street. Increasing numbers of multinationals are refusing to recognise trade unions and this has been mirrored by attacks on union rights by Irish bosses eg. Pat the Baker and Nolan Transport. The government through the I.D.A. has signalled its approval of union avoidance and have themselves pursued union breaking strategies in a string of semi-state companies. The bosses and their state know there is no such thing as social partnership. It is just something to fool the workers with.

All this has been justified by the bureaucracy claiming they now have a say in economic policy. As we have seen, this policy is simply that of the bosses, multinationals and the European Union. The requirement of multinationals to have 'good industrial relations' ie. a docile workforce has driven much southern government policy but this has also suited native bosses. On the shopfloor the embracing of the bosses' new Human Resource Management techniques has replicated their complete capitulation at the macroeconomic level. Peter Cassels, General Secretary of I.C.T.U., rubbishes opposition to the new management techniques saying that "unions should acknowledge and appreciate the vital role of genuinely entrepreneurial capitalists." He calls on workers to trust these capitalists but he shows that they cannot even trust him.

The Japanese car plant is held up as the quintessential example of the new high-tech production unit of the future which I.C.T.U. and the bosses would have us copy, but the reality of these places is less appealing than the picture painted by the bureaucrats. The 'team' concept introduced in these plants which is so lauded by I.C.T.U. leaders is no more than a mechanism whereby peer pressure is brought to bear on individual workers to stick an increasingly furious pace. In the old fashioned 'Fordist' car plants workers actively laboured for 45 seconds in each minute. In the new H.R.M. structured plants they work for around 57 seconds a minute. Workers are typically required to submit to forced overtime and receive fewer holidays. Turnover of workers in such plants in England is considerable. So bad is it that in Japan the All Toyota Union discovered that 124,000 of its 200,000 members suffer from chronic fatigue. Behind all the talk of 'team working' and 'staff empowerment' lies old fashioned exploitation.

The economic crisis has produced an employer offensive which has succeeded in cutting into the living standards and working conditions of many workers. In the last 5 years this has involved not only the private sector but also the semi-state sector where the government has shown it is no more a partner of the working class than the bosses. In An Post, Aer Lingus, Irish Steel, TEAM and others the state has prosecuted a blatant assault on jobs and conditions, often bringing in special macho management teams to spearhead the attack. In all cases different aspects of H.R.M. have been employed - casualisation of the workforce, contracting out of work, increased flexibility and temporary staffing. In all cases it means a reduction in jobs and in every case quoted the workers have attempted to fight back. Irish Rail faced its first national strike in almost 40 years in 1994 over attempts to introduce work changes and create 200 redundancies. In 1993 An Post workers fought a six week dispute to stop 1,500 redundancies and the closure of 550 sub- post offices. In Irish Steel and TEAM special management teams were brought in waving the big stick of E.U. regulations. TEAM Aer Lingus is a perfect example of the strategy of the employers to make workers pay for a crisis and the militancy of workers in fighting back. As in all other cases it also shows the total willingness of the I.C.T.U. bureaucrats to join in the attack on the workers and to actively prevent any solidarity action with those in struggle. A clear pattern has now

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built up where, when the fake independent Labour Relations Commission and Labour Court fails to impose the employer agenda, the I.C.T.U. bureaucrats step in to ensure the workers are isolated and defeated. In TEAM this was particularly obvious; the workers themselves were aware of I.C.T.U.'s role because of a history of struggle against the bureaucracy. However their militancy was not enough and nor has it been for any other group of workers forced to defend themselves.

Alternative

The most vocal opposition to social partnership has criticised it because it has led to the passivity of rank and file workers alienated from the unions where all decisions are taken over their heads in deals such as the P.C.W. Many workers in the private sector have been forced to accept pay rises they could easily have bettered if left to themselves, unhindered by such deals. The argument is that workplace militancy has been suffocated.

All this is true, but as the recent history of workers' struggles has shown, militancy is not enough. Between 1982 and 1987 there were no deals on the model of the P.N.R., P.E.S.P. or P.C.W. although of course I.C.T.U. did not adopt any kind of fighting strategy and never abandoned the policy of class collaboration. Nevertheless mere absence of such deals is not in itself enough. Between 1981 and 1987 workers living standards fell by around 10% and trade union membership by 50,000. The working class became increasingly divided and fragmented. Workers in some private sector industries did do better but this meant that many public sector workers lagged well behind. This division assisted the imposition of social partnership deals on a working class facing an employer and state offensive but with no coherent and centralised response. The bureaucrats say that this free for all was free collective bargaining in action and it has failed; some sort of deal is inevitably necessary. In fact during this period the bureaucracy never gave up cosy deals with the state and the bosses. There was no attempt to organise a strong and united movement against either of them. In other words there was nothing collective about the bargaining and the bureaucracy has wrongly equated free collective bargaining with free for all in many workers minds.

The deals, because they include many aspects of government policy, have openly revealed the political role trade unions play. The alternative to their present policies is also political but this time it is the politics of the working class ie. socialism.

This means socialists are not in favour of each group of workers seeking only to look after themselves although we fully support each sections right to defend itself, launch its own struggles, and seek to give them complete solidarity. We are in favour of a united working class putting it's own demands on the state and employers so that the economic crisis is paid for by the capitalists and their system.

This means rejecting any idea of social partnership or the type of deal to which it has led. The trade union movement should demand full employment at decent wages through a massive programme of investment in productive industry and social services. This would reverse the cuts imposed by successive governments over the last 15 years and end the programme of privatisation which threatens many public sector workers. This programme could only be implemented by the trade union movement acting as the leadership of the interests of all workers and oppressed. It would require, as our programme has outlined, a workers plan for the Irish economy financed through taxation of the rich and workers control of the major financial and productive resources in the state.

There is no point having an alternative plan if the working class movement does not reject the attacks on them that are taking place now. The only immediate remedy to the massive unemployment and emigration which effects both Irish states is work sharing with no loss of pay. It is a scandal that many in work are run ragged while others are idle. The immediate popularisation of a 35 hour week with no loss of pay is a key demand for the trade union movement in a fight against unemployment. Instead of forming partnerships with governments and big business it should be forming an alliance with the unemployed and working class community organisations. It should directly organise the unemployed to fight for work sharing, a 35 hour week and a state investment programme under workers control. This is a real alternative to the cheap training programmes which governments use to hide rather than deal with unemployment. The trade union movement must

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oppose all redundancies demanding to see the accounts and business secrets of all companies seeking to create redundancies. Where these reveal real financial losses for the owners the workers should demand that they be relieved of their burden and the company nationalised under the control of the workforce who can then establish a new strategy for developing production and employment.

The union bureaucracy has claimed that the globalisation of production has left workers defenceless against multinationals who demand cuts in wages or changes in work practices and conditions, threatening to pull out of the country if their demands are not met. Of course this is a real problem but not one that cannot be overcome. From the lips of bureaucrats and reformist 'left' politicians it is an alibi covering their complicity in the attacks.

When trade union organisations were first created they were very often confined to one region or town and were in a weak position against an employer who could move production from one location to another. The working class combated this by organising nationally. The same approach is needed now. To the international strategy of blackmail by the multinationals workers need a new international strategy of solidarity. Workers are already organised internationally through institutions such as the European Trade Union Congress and the International Federation of Free Trade Unions. Unfortunately such organisation is almost wholly at the level of the bureaucrats with little or no rank and file involvement. The first steps to create a rank and file organisation is by setting up inter-company links so that, for example, Packard workers in Dublin could have called on workers in the company's other plants in the rest of Europe and further afield to refuse to accept any work transferred from Dublin. It is a sorry fact that internationalism is more developed among the capitalist class than it is among workers. Effective defence of even immediate interests demands that this has to change.

Unemployment is only one challenge facing the workers movement. For those who have a job the movement should demand automatic cost of living increases for all workers, especially when inflation is a calculated strategy to redistribute income from the workers to the bosses who reap high profits from high prices.

Such a strategy is a comprehensive alternative to the pro-capitalist free market ideology which dominates social partnership. It counterposes workers control and a living wage to fake productivity and profit sharing schemes which try to make workers join in their own exploitation. To the tyranny of the capitalist market and competition it poses the rational and planned development of the economy.

The working class through the trade union movement is a sleeping giant, potentially the most powerful force in Irish society. I.C.T.U. recorded 681,000 members in affiliated trade unions in 1994. The Irish movement has not suffered the same significant decline in membership that has afflicted British trade unions. Trade Union density, that is membership as a percentage of those in work, is 50%, substantially higher than in most European countries. A dynamic strategy could see this increase dramatically. Unfortunately despite its potential strength the Irish working class is a political mouse with minimal independent presence in Irish politics. The trade union leadership has done nothing to educate working class people of their separate class interests and their potential power to change society.

The socialist transformation of Irish society and a strategy to fight the present austerity offensive is the only alternative to increasing misery caused by the capitalist rat race. Militant workers know that the present leadership of the trade unions will never adopt such a strategy. When I.C.T.U. bureaucrats move into workers struggles they do so with the sole objective of bringing a speedy end to the fight by selling out, often by directly attacking the workers themselves

Strike action, occupation of the workplace, mass picketing and seeking solidarity action irrespective of anti-union laws is the only way that workers can defend themselves against redundancies, privatisation and new draconian work practices. The obstacle to effective use of such tactics is very often not only the law, state or employers but the I.C.T.U. leaders. In the most recent struggles - in Irish Steel or TEAM I.C.T.U. has stood in the way of, and sabotaged, adoption of a winning strategy especially the solidarity action which alone can win these struggles and for which the trade union movement was created.

A prerequisite for doing this and rejecting social partnership in any
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form is the removal of the present leadership of I.C.T.U. and of the individual union bureaucrats who support them. This is not a question of personalities. In the last analysis even 'left' trade union leaders will seek a united front of the bureaucracy before struggles based on rank and file control. Still less will they adopt the socialist alternative outlined here which as we have repeatedly emphasised is the only one consistent with total and absolute opposition to austerity and an effective strategy against it. It is therefore not just that the trade union bureaucrats have to be replaced but the bureaucracy as a whole social layer has to be removed and the trade union movement democratised and put under the real control of its members.

This is because the bureaucracy develops its own interests separate and often opposed to rank and file workers as a result not just of its role as intermediary and negotiator between workers and their bosses or the state. Much more important, it develops a lifestyle and material interests separate and above the workers it is supposed to represent. The union structure on which its position depends becomes more important than the workers this structure was created to defend. The fat salaries of I.C.T.U. bureaucrats, some earning over £70,000 a year plus perks, are disgraceful and the increased incorporation of the trade union bureaucracy into the state through all sorts of government sponsored bodies, state companies and social gatherings is a source of corruption. From all this it follows that democratisation of the trade union movement means not just the election of a new leadership but a change in the very nature of the leadership. It means a leadership accountable to and controlled by the rank and file, paid only the average wage of its members. This will weed out the social climbers interested only in their careers. Trade union officials must all be elected, with regular re-election each year, directly accountable to the conferences of the members and subject to immediate recall and re-selection should this prove necessary.

The gulf that lies between the bureaucracy and rank and file means that the only way to democratise the trade union movement, make it an instrument of struggle and give it a socialist programme is not reliance on any left wing leader but in the creation of a rank and file movement determined to carry out each of these tasks. Such a movement would not be a replacement for the present unions but seek to organise across

every union at shopfloor and workplace level in a democratic fashion. It would be composed of workplace shop stewards and delegates elected and directly accountable to the members. Its task would be adoption of a programme to win back control of the existing unions for the membership and give them new fighting leaderships and policies. Regular conferences at every level of such a movement would help ensure its control by the membership and its ability to give a coherent and generalised answer to the whole workers movement and not just to sectional interests. A militant rank and file movement across all trade unions is absolutely necessary to force the bureaucracy to organise effective solidarity with workers in struggle or, where it refuse or seeks to prevent such action, to organise independently and against it. Every dispute in the last period has shown the necessity of a permanent rank and file movement to organise real solidarity with those in struggle.

Unfortunately workers involved in disputes are confronted by the immediacy of the issue and often cannot see the relevance of this strategy for their own urgent and pressing needs. There is no doubt that creating such a movement is no overnight task. Nevertheless individual struggles such as those occurring recently can be the catalyst for the building of such a militant rank and file opposition to the present leadership and can create the dynamic to put the bureaucrats on the spot. Though many of these struggles have not seen the workers achieving their demands or prevented the bosses gaining theirs and battles may have been lost, in many cases the war is not over and for many workers the struggle lies ahead. It is thus an immediate task of militant workers to put the creation of a rank and file movement on the agenda.

Its creation will in all probability not come in a 'big bang' but could originate in the creation of a public sector alliance, for example in support of workers in the semi-state sector facing redundancies or privatisation. Undoubtedly the bureaucracy will denounce such actions as dividing the unity of the trade union movement but such arguments must be rejected. What is proposed is not breakaway unions but the creation of a movement to win control of the existing movement. In this movement there should be no truce or unity with the bureauc-

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racy or right wing which sacrifices jobs and conditions in its own unity with the bosses. Militant unity around fighting policies and a socialist programme is the only worthwhile unity. The trade union movement has the potential to become a key instrument in the fight for the conquest of power by working people in a socialist society. The key is creating a new leadership whose first task is the rejection of social partnership.

The North

The treachery of the I.C.T.U. bureaucracy in Dublin is matched, if not in fact exceeded by the bureaucracy of the Northern Ireland Committee of I.C.T.U.. The very existence of a virtually autonomous Northern Ireland committee is itself capitulation to imperialist and loyalist inspired divisions in the Irish working class and its labour movement. While opposing occasional loyalist and 6 county labourist demands for an 'Ulster T.U.C.', in effect a sectarian demand, socialists are for the abolition of the virtual autonomy of the Northern Ireland Committee and the real integration and unity of the Irish trade union movement.

After some delay the Tory government has implemented the same anti-union laws in the north as in Britain, with minimal response from the trade union movement. Thatcherite policies of cuts, privatisation and local pay bargaining in the public sector are now all in full swing. In the past the northern unions and members could rely on British unions to achieve gains for them which they themselves did not organise to achieve. Localised pay bargaining and privatisation endangers these gains and threatens to widen the existing gap in earnings between the north and comparable groups in Britain. A vibrant, fighting trade union movement is as necessary in the north as it is in the south.

Instead however the bureaucracy has echoed the hyped up propaganda of a 'peace dividend' which promises jobs by the tens of thousands and widespread prosperity. It repeats the tired old, and failed, policy proposals of begging multinationals to invest in the north, promoting tax hand outs and subsidies, calling for more community involvement and increased north-south economic cooperation. Most, if not all, of these proposals predate the ceasefire and are as worthless now as they always have been.

The policy of begging multinationals to set up in any part of Ireland because of the needs of the local people credits the controllers of these multinationals with a compassion they do not, and never will, have. This is tacitly acknowledged by the call for a 10% corporation tax in the north to equal that in the south. The utter failure of multinationals to deliver lasting jobs and prosperity in the south over the last 35 years has been quietly ignored. The call for community involvement, while seemingly progressive, in fact does not give working class people the jobs or the control they really need to radically change their circumstances and usher in a new era of some democratic control of the economy. It promises a desperate scramble to grab a piece of the action, for a slice of the high profile money from Washington, Brussels or London where the more hyped up the money is the more meagre and ultimately irrelevant it will be to meeting real need. The International Fund for Ireland is a shining example; the money nearly always ends up in the coffers of local well-heeled sharks in otherwise deprived areas.

Finally the much trumpeted north-south cooperation has been accompanied by predictions of a vigorous all-Ireland economy centred on a supposedly dynamic Belfast-Dublin corridor. The prospect of a prosperous all-Ireland capitalism is a pure mirage. It is nowhere explained how this dynamic economy is to be created and there is no evidence that a qualitative leap forward can be taken by Irish capitalism- peace dividend or no peace dividend. While some flagship projects will develop; in general low paid, part time, temporary jobs in tourism and some service industries will replace high paid, full time, permanent jobs in the states' repressive apparatus. There is no indication of any mechanism that would allow Irish capitalism to escape its semi-colonial subordination to imperialism. The peace dividend, such as it is, will not lead to any sustained economic growth and qualitative reduction in unemployment. All-Ireland capitalism is no answer to the failures of partitioned capitalism.

The empty box which is the peace dividend was rudely exposed for those that cared to look on the day after the much publicised investment conference held in Belfast and fronted by John Major. The northern paper the "Irish News" recorded at the top of its front page the announcement at the conference of 300 new jobs, many of which were either not new or were merely promised, but it also recorded at the

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bottom of the page the loss of exactly the same number of jobs the previous day. The peace dividend, just like that promised after the end of the cold war, will prove an illusion assisting the cover up of the British government's real economic programme of cuts and privatisation. By ignoring this and repeating the nonsense about peace dividends the trade union bureaucracy attempts to fool its members and by doing so betrays them.

Politics

The failure to have any independent economic policy is mirrored in the trade unions' failure to have an independent political one. In the north the trade unions have failed to vigorously oppose repression, even when used against its own members. It failed to condemn Bloody Sunday, failed to oppose internment when it was introduced, failed to take action when one of its members was murdered in Castlereagh R.U.C. station, failed to condemn the sectarian R.U.C. and U.D.R./R.I.R. and failed to take any real action against the battery of repressive laws which have been used against tens of thousands of people over the last 25 years. Instead it has supported the British state and reserved its real harsh words for republicans (and to a lesser extent loyalists). It has often turned workers genuine anger against sectarian attacks into worthless campaigns such as the 'Better Life for All' campaign which because it was so general and vague failed to offend anyone and failed to tackle the real, hard issues.

It has done this quite consciously because it is mortally afraid of offending its unionist and loyalist membership. It says that any move to create a real opposition to sectarian discrimination, repression and imperialist exploitation (even if it recognised its existence) would immediately lead to a split in the trade union movement. The germ of truth in this argument covers up the present reality of a movement already divided (north from south) and so internally compromised that it is politically neutered and irrelevant. By its determination to treat the thoroughly rotten and sectarian northern state as if it were a normal capitalist democracy it confers a legitimacy on it which it does not deserve.

The only alternative to this objectively pro-imperialist and subjectively

petrified position is one which organises around the economic and political programme of a rank and file challenge to the bureaucracy on the basis of fighting policies, a united Irish working class and a socialist transformation of society. The only way to create a real, as opposed to fictitious, unity of Protestant and catholic workers is to show Protestant workers the real value of all-Ireland workers unity in a democratic and militant labour movement.

Just as the working class needs a healthy industrial arm it also needs its own direct political voice in the shape of a political party. The greatest shortcoming of the Irish trade union movement is its failure to create an independent working class party representing the whole of the Irish working class. 'Independent' means that it has no links with the bosses or the state and does not renege on the interests of the working class through compromising its socialist programme. The full and complete expression of independent working class politics is a revolutionary Marxist party. However Marxists realise that in the real world the struggle to create such a party will not be easy, nor a simple linear process of growth of existing small revolutionary organisations. This is why Marxists welcome and encourage every move towards the working class establishing an independent political voice, every attempt to break from support for or dependence on openly (or even not so open) parties which are organised expressions of various sections of the capitalist or middle classes.

Socialists therefore welcome the recent debate in some trade union circles in the north about establishing a party of labour, a party which would stand openly for working class interests. Unfortunately the voices promoting this course show no sign of understanding what these interests are. At a Belfast Trades Council forum the debate on this revolved around three alternatives. The proposals put forward have relevance to the whole working class, north and south.

The first called on the British Labour Party to organise in the north. This can only be demanded by asserting the legitimacy of imperialism and the partition of the country; national oppression of the Irish people; maintenance of a northern state based only on a sectarian head count; continuing division of the Irish working class north and south; and a wilful blindness to the failed and increasingly anti-socialist policies of the Party. While this party may represent in some sense a real voice for

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British workers, even if a more and more bureaucratic and right wing one, it represents no such thing to any section of Irish workers. British workers vote for and contribute funds to the British Labour Party because, despite its record, its creation in opposition to the Liberal Party at the turn of the century and its history of giving limited reforms at certain times represent real gains for working class struggle. This is not true for northern workers. The party is not their creation, they remained tied to unionist and nationalist parties, and the history of the party is not one of being a site of working class struggle for real socialism against a rotten leadership but the history of a party which supported the sectarian Stormont regime for 50 years and presided over internment and torture in Castlereagh in the 1970's.

The second alternative put forward is of a Northern Ireland Labour Party which is presented in either very mildly reformist terms or even by some such as the 'Militant Labour' organisation which claims to be Marxist. The distinction between these two variants is one without real difference because both again suffer from most of the problems outlined as flowing from the demand for the British Labour Party to set up in the north. It also wilfully minimises the pathetic record of the old N.I.L.P. which could not even support the opening of park swings on a Sunday! It was terrified of offending loyalism so it accepted partition and whatever paper position on the border any new party takes, its very name and organisation is an acceptance of the sectarian framework set by imperialism.

The section of the programme on sectarianism and the national question explains the socialist position on partition. The creation of a six county labour party would not be a step forward for any section of the Irish working class. Its creation would be a reflection of the force of unionism within the Protestant working class and the imperialism which sustains the 6 county state. It would miseducate any radicalising Protestant workers that their class interests are reconcilable with imperialism and confirm to many catholic workers that what is presented as socialism is something which unites with unionism in the denial of democratic rights and support for a sectarian state.

The third proposal is the organisation of the Irish Labour Party in the north. This party claims to represent the interests of working people in the southern state. It does no such thing. Even its political opponents

on the right have mocked its timid and cowardly history of failure not only to confront the boss class but also the reactionary power of the catholic church. From the start it abdicated leadership of the democratic revolution to the bourgeois forces in Sinn Fein and then objectively aided its most reactionary wing when it became the loyal opposition to the new Free State government. It has supported and indeed implemented the most vicious attacks on working people through social partnership deals and has participated in coalition with whichever right wing party will have it. It has a long and inglorious history of opposition to any anti-imperialist struggle in the north. Its claims to socialism are entirely bogus.

Unfortunately the political weakness of the Irish working class is expressed in the fact that not only do the majority of southern workers not accept this analysis, they are not even conscious that as a class they have separate interests that must be represented by a separate political party. The majority vote for capitalist parties and historically, in particular, Fianna Fail. A fundamental task of Irish socialists is to win the working class to an understanding that they need their own party.

A basic element of this task is to encourage workers to identify with the need for a political expression of the working class by supporting voting for the Labour Party in elections. This is proposed not out of any illusions or agreement with the policies and programme of the party, which socialists never cease to denounce and expose, but because it represents such a basic 'class' vote. It is a recognition that the working class needs its own party and should not under any circumstances vote for one of the capitalist parties such as Fianna Fail. Of course the purpose of such a vote is negated if the Labour Party immediately goes into coalition with capitalist parties, as it very frequently does. This is why socialists raise the demand for no coalition when they call for a vote for Labour. This demand is made for another reason. A basic motivation for Marxists advocating a vote for the Irish Labour Party is that once in power the working class can rid itself of any illusions that this party can deliver real change in the interests of workers. In coalition the Labour Party can offer excuses that they are prisoners of their coalition partners. Out of coalition they have no such excuses.

Objection to such a tactic is often made on the basis that Irish workers

have no illusions in the Irish Labour Party, hence its minority status, and that socialists only create illusions in it by calling for a vote for it. This is a real danger, which is why socialists must never waver from opposition to labour policies even during an election. However the problem is not so much creating illusions in the Labour Party but the fact that most workers still vote and have illusions in, parties such as Fianna Fail, although this is beginning to erode. In this sense the call for a vote for Labour is simultaneously a call not to vote for bosses parties and a call to vote for a party which, despite its right wing policies, is not based on the capitalist class but was historically founded by the trade unions and still retains the varying support and affiliation of some trade union organisations.

The see-saw history of support for the Labour Party which rises during periods in opposition and then declines during periods in government shows that failure to put it into government actually allows illusions in the party to increase. Out of government Labour can, and usually does, promise all sorts of advances for working people and for democratic rights. Putting it on the spot is an effective way of removing such illusions.

In power or out of it socialists do not peddle the lie that the Labour Party can be turned into some sort of instrument of workers emancipation. Trusted by the capitalist class to participate in governing the state, the whole history of the party and its undemocratic, top-down structure is convincing proof of its essentially pro-capitalist nature. It cannot be reformed.

The call for a class vote, a basic identification by workers that they need to vote on class lines, even when expressed weakly as a vote for the Labour Party, is only part of a process to turn workers from class identification to class action. When in coalition socialists struggle in the trade unions for them to take up the demand that the Labour Party break from coalition and implement a programme that defends working class interests. Having urged them to cast a class vote socialists go on to urge them to fight for working class policies against the Labour Party when it proves unwilling to carry them out itself, attempting to demonstrate that working class advancement will only be achieved by workers themselves through a genuine workers party. However this is only possible after winning workers to understand the need for class

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politics and the test of government showing that such politics will not come from Labour.

Workers must not be diverted into believing that this road must automatically lead to an attempt to change the Labour Party. When that party refuses to break from coalition socialists in the trade union movement must strip away any excuses from the union bureaucrats that their hands are tied by the position of the Labour Party through demanding that the trade union movement put forward a political alternative based on themselves, one really committed to working class interests. This would mean breaking from Labour and putting forward as the alternative the creation of a mass workers party committed to the unity of the Irish working class and to socialism. At the moment such a party does not exist, nor can it be spirited into existence. Any call for a vote for any small grouping which simply declares support for such an idea is to replace illusions in capitalist and labourist parties with illusions in the character of small revolutionary organisations which believe they can become such a party through propaganda and simple linear growth.

This is an error often made by genuine Marxists who look on the call for a mass all-Ireland workers party as a call for a new all-Ireland reformist party. Some actually support the demand despite believing this is its purpose while others use this as a reason not to support such a call. As Marxists we support such a demand because it is an objective task which faces the whole working class, not just a small band of revolutionaries. We should not postpone their addressing this need until they have been won over to revolutionary politics because addressing it is precisely one way of winning them to revolutionary politics in the first place.

The whole working class desperately needs a party that will fight for its interests now. We argue that such a party cannot be created except by breaking from all existing parties but will only arise as a real possibility as a result of major class battles involving tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of working class people. In such a situation to write off the creation of a mass workers party as inevitably reformist is the height of pessimism and a failure to put the needs and tasks of the working class before the narrow, politically sectarian, interests of one's own small revolutionary organisation.

At this stage in the construction of such a party, which Marxists will struggle to make a revolutionary one, it is necessary to support every step forward in the fight to win workers to class consciousness, including calling on them to vote for the Labour Party. But this also means uncompromising opposition to all attempts to legitimise the division in the Irish working class by those supporting either a six-county labour party or the British Labour Party organising in the north. Socialists should argue for example that the task of Belfast trade unionists is not to fight for Belfast socialism or six-county socialism (whatever that could possibly be) but socialism for the whole Irish working class as part of a wider international struggle. This means support for the creation of a mass all-Ireland workers party committed to workers unity, opposition to social partnership and a programme for the transformation of society through socialist revolution.

6.

The Struggle Against Sectarianism

One of the most crucial tasks facing socialists in Ireland is the struggle against sectarianism but so powerful has it been that many socialists have looked for easy scapegoats on whom to blame its influence, sought easy remedies which fail to confront it at every level or most frequently simply denied its strength and endurance. In the end they merely pose as its opponents at one level only to reinforce it at another.

The most obvious and brutal manifestation of sectarianism is the physical violence inflicted on workers in the North. Hundreds of working class people have been murdered because of their religion. Overwhelmingly they have been Catholics killed by Loyalist terrorists, but Protestant workers have been killed by Republicans in circumstances which can only be described as sectarian. It's the obvious duty of socialists to denounce and oppose such attacks. Many workers have demonstrated their opposition and left their work in protest at attacks on them. Again socialists should be to the forefront in organising and supporting such actions. But this is not enough.

The leadership of the trade union movement embodied in N.I.C.-I.C.T.U. have called on trade unionists to rely on the British state - on the R.U.C. and British army - for protection. They have called for 'hot lines' to the R.U.C.. In their pretence at opposing sectarianism they ignore the sectarian nature of the R.U.C. and its long documented collusion with Loyalist terrorist groups. The 'hot line' to the R.U.C. has an extension to the Loyalist gangs. In failing to oppose imperialism and its local state machine the bureaucrats of the labour movement have had no answers to even the basic physical security of workers either in the workplace or in the areas that they live in. In the end the only defence that workers have is that which they create themselves.

The first step in such defence is to oppose all attacks on workers because of their religion and to call on all organisations claiming in some way to defend the rights of workers to unite in a campaign against them. Loyalism is openly sectarian and enshrines on its banner Protestant sectarianism and the demand for 'Ulster' trade unionism. A workers campaign against sectarianism can only be openly and clearly anti-Loyalist.

Republicans on the other hand have claimed to stand for the unity of the Irish people and the unity of the working class. Socialists who also oppose imperialism and the sectarian Northern state must not remain silent if Republicans are responsible for sectarian attacks. Defence of the working class must never be subordinated to a political schema which claims that because Republicans or others have led the struggle against the sectarian state they cannot therefore be responsible for sectarian attacks, or that we must not speak out for fear of being seen to side with imperialism. Socialists must demand of whoever engages in struggle against imperialism that they reject all forms of sectarianism and that they carry out their struggle in the non-sectarian way they usually claim to in their programme. When they do not Socialists must expose their hypocrisy.

Real defence against sectarian attacks must also denounce the collusion of the state with Loyalist sectarians and the repressive policies of the state itself. A defence campaign which ignores state repression or harassment and attacks in working class areas is a betrayal. Given the relationship of the trade union bureaucrats and 'respectable'

community leaders with the state it is clear that such a campaign could only be built by the initiative and organisation of rank and file workers.

Roots of Sectarianism

Physical attacks on workers have only been the most obvious manifestation of sectarianism but they are precisely only that - an expression of sectarianism and not its fundamental cause. Sectarianism cannot be reduced to the ideas in peoples heads nor the actions these ideas prompt and neither can it be reduced to the military activity of armed groups. In order to understand sectarianism it is necessary to understand its material roots in society. To do otherwise is to fatally underestimate its strength and durability and the enormity of the task facing socialists.

Sectarianism is based on systematic inequality between catholic and Protestant workers in the North. It could not, and would not, have reason to exist if the conditions of these workers were more or less the same. Inequality is the breeding ground for sectarianism just as it is also for racism and sexism. In no small part this is due to the systematic discrimination against catholic workers by imperialism and its six county state. The creation, in the words of a former Stormont prime minister, of a "Protestant parliament and a Protestant state" was the pinnacle of this sectarian policy. Through the state discrimination became institutionalised at the highest level with the bloody results that followed.

By 1971, after 50 years of the Northern state, Catholic unemployment was over $2\frac{1}{2}$ times that of Protestants and Catholics tended to be concentrated in poorly paid occupations. Disadvantage in employment was reinforced by discrimination in housing allocation often motivated by the desire to secure Protestant majorities for local councils. The most infamous case was Derry, where a 60% Catholic majority was converted by gerrymandered ward boundaries into a unionist majority on the council. Protestant police and the notorious 'B' specials armed with draconian legislation ensured that the lid was kept on the bitterness and resistance that sectarianism provoked.

While the official workers movement opposed such policies and some

prominent trades unionists were active in the early Civil Rights movement, the rise of that struggle under a leadership outside the workers movement confirmed the official labour movement's failure to lead the struggle against sectarianism. Once again its alliance with imperialism prevented it from defending working people.

When pressed to reform and democratise itself the Northern state proved incapable of doing so and began to fall apart. Imperialism intervened directly and, disclaiming responsibility for the past, promised a non-sectarian future. Through a series of laws and fair employment quangos it has claimed that sectarianism is being removed and that struggle against it is no longer necessary.

But this is far from the truth. The level of catholic unemployment remains over 2 times that of their Protestant counterparts. Despite enormous changes in the pattern of employment, with the decline of old industries and the rise in public sector and service employment, Catholics have lost their jobs over the past 20 years faster than Protestants. Protestant male unemployment in 1971 was 6.6%, catholic 14.9%. By the mid '80s the figures stood at 17.3% and 35.1%. Today the differences remain as wide. Catholics remain disproportionately concentrated in unskilled jobs. Even with imperialism's supposed success story of housing a recent survey confirms that Catholics continue to lack equal access to quality housing. Public bodies such as the Eastern Health Board, Limavady and Belfast Councils and Queens University have all been found guilty of discrimination. From the biggest employer to the most prestigious little has changed for the Catholic working class.

It has become commonplace to argue that discrimination has been reduced by direct British Rule, resulting in particular in a new comfortable and self-satisfied catholic middle class. Such a class does exist, but this is not due to enlightened, non-sectarian imperialist rule and its position is not secure. The Fair Employment legislation which has assisted the growth of the catholic middle class has been forced by the last 25 years of political struggle and in particular by campaigns such as the McBride Principles. Already a backlash against equality legislation is arising, here as around the world, and the reimposition of a devolved government in the six counties would see these weak advances threatened further. Today for the catholic middle class parity

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has not been achieved. In the Northern Ireland Civil Service Catholics still make up only 12.9% of the top management positions.

Of course not only Catholics have suffered from discrimination and all sectarianism must be opposed, but statistics show that it is anti-catholic discrimination which is the issue. There is no equals sign between anti-catholic and anti-Protestant discrimination and to pretend that their is is to fail to recognise and tackle the real discrimination that exists.

This essential foundation of sectarianism has terrified many would-be non-sectarian socialists who have responded by claiming that what is important is that both Protestant and catholic workers are suffering from unemployment and that to highlight the differences in employment opportunities is divisive. Instead we should call for working class unity against the cuts and the bosses.

In fact this approach is no more than a cover for the complete failure of many socialists to face up to sectarianism at every level - including discrimination in employment. At most these cowards will claim to oppose discrimination but will have no concrete programme which specifically deals with it. If it were enough to call simply for workers unity against the bosses then sectarianism would not be an issue, for it would have failed in its objective of preventing such unity. Realising that sectarianism is a major barrier to workers unity is to recognise that unity around 'class' demands cannot succeed unless socialists strike simultaneously at the roots which support sectarianism. Socialists must have a concrete programme challenging discrimination. This task must not be left to the state or to pressure on the investment policy of U.S. multinationals.

This means that we should have no confidence in British anti-discrimination legislation which in some ways actually prevents real action and excludes tackling its structural supports. A purely negative position of being against all discrimination is not enough and cannot hope to achieve any real or speedy advance to equality. A programme of positive steps in favour of recruiting catholic workers is the only way to promote speedy progress towards equality. This programme should be fought for and become the property of the working class movement and not be seen as an imposition on it. It would then be seen for what

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it is - a move towards equality - a core value of any socialist movement.

Of course this policy has been rejected by the leaders of the trade unions as discriminatory and divisive. Hiring catholic workers is denounced as sectarian. But what other way is there to redress the balance? By rejecting this obvious solution these 'non - sectarians' in fact condemn catholic workers to continued inequality and the whole working class to continued division and sectarianism. The 'non - sectarians' say we should solve the problem by opposing all unemployment and fighting for full employment.

Of course we must fight all unemployment and such a fight will make it that much easier to win Protestant workers. It proves that we are not for an equality of misery (although it is ignored that sectarianism is precisely about the inequality of misery). But ignoring the higher level of catholic unemployment means ignoring discrimination; having no special policies to combat it means having no priority of ending it. A campaign for full employment which does not also at its very heart include opposition to discrimination and positive promotion of equality is, at the very best, one that would leave Catholics in jobs, but the lowest and worst paid ones.

These 'non-sectarians' hide behind the rhetoric of a socialist paradise tomorrow to dodge the concrete task of defeating loyalist sectarianism today. Catholic workers, suffering a double disadvantage, are pushed to the sidelines.

Socialists should have no illusions about this sort of non - sectarian policy. It fundamentally fails to challenge the sectarian ideas held by many Protestant workers. Indeed its proponents claim that such ideas are not widespread or are injected from outside the working class. If this were true there would be no problem about fighting sectarianism and the proposal to do so wouldn't cause such fear and panic among the trade union bureaucracy!

Such a fight is desperately needed. One opinion poll conducted in the mid - eighties showed that while over half of Catholics believed that Protestant workers had a better chance of finding a job only 9% of Protestant workers accepted this. Demanding a unity which ignores the fact that the majority of the workforce refuses even to accept that

discrimination exists is to build a false and fragile unity. Capitalism constantly seeks to set worker against worker in the struggle for jobs and wages. It does this through increasing unemployment, racism, sexism and other divisions in the class. Many workers instinctively see the value of unity in the workplace, which is why we support integrated workforces, and this gives socialists the possibility of arguing for a wider unity outside the single workplace or union.

But when, for example, Shorts aircraft workers struggle against layoffs or for better conditions what resonance does the demand for unity with catholic workers bring when only around 10% of the workforce is catholic? Within that factory it is quite possible for Protestant workers to fight against their employers without having to challenge sectarian ideas. This means however that socialists will find it that much more difficult to win support from catholic workers and create the broader class unity we desire.

Brought face to face with reality, the arguments of the "non - sectarian" socialists fail again. Workers unity cannot be cemented only around a long-term interest in fighting for socialism. They must share immediate interests in fighting to defend themselves against a common oppression. Without this sort of struggle no battle for socialism is possible.

Sectarian State

Discrimination in employment and housing and so on is the result of sectarianism as well as its cause. Decisive in promoting and defending this discrimination has been imperialism and its local Northern state. Unionist prime ministers used to boast of not employing Catholics and called on others to do likewise. Open sectarianism like this is now avoided but this has just made it more cynical. A leaked secret government report admitted that catholic disadvantage was "unlikely to alter significantly over the next decade" at the same time that it listed, among other things, that almost twice the proportion of catholic households as Protestant are dependent on social security and that 67% of long term male unemployment is catholic.

Government employment has risen significantly under direct imperialist rule but the basic pattern of catholic unemployment compared to

Protestant remains unchanged. The largest subsidies to industry have gone to the most notorious discriminators - Shorts and Harland and Wolff. Just as Britain has not rid the state apparatus of violent repression so it has not challenged its sectarianism.

By securing inequality and fomenting division in the working class the state has been crucial to the maintenance of sectarianism. The marginal but nevertheless real privileges accorded to the Protestant, in comparison to the Catholic, working class has won for the state its loyalty. The trade union leaders have boasted that the unions are the only organisations to unite Catholic and Protestant workers. Others have pointed to unity around industrial struggles such as the health workers strike of the early '80s. These factors should not be taken for granted and should be accepted as real gains for the Irish working class, but it is equally clear that they have coexisted with the political division of the working class and the allegiance of Protestant workers to imperialism and to its most bigoted loyalist defenders. Pretending the workers are already more or less united is unpolitical nonsense and actually underrates the importance of the anti-sectarian struggle. Winning Protestant workers from supporting imperialism and its sectarian state is a key task for socialists in defeating sectarianism.

To do this socialists have to understand that real material factors win workers to struggle and to socialism - not simply socialist propaganda. They have to understand that the question of partition and imperialism is not about 'flags' and 'symbols'. Reformist socialists can always be identified by their saying that 'you can't eat a flag.' But what if the flag means that you can't get a job, promotion, equal treatment or might even get killed because of your religion? Then these 'socialists' are denying reality. They talk about workers unity the most but refuse to recognise that partition is the fundamental cause of division between northern and southern workers and also the mechanism for ensuring the sectarian division of Protestant and Catholic workers in the North.

These type of socialists wrongly believe that economic and social issues are the ones that really affect workers and that the 'constitutional' ones are in some way either false or at least less immediate and can therefore be tackled after unity around so called 'class' issues has been achieved first. But repression, discrimination and sectarianism are at least as immediate and vital to workers as wages and conditions. Postponing

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action on these issues divides socialists from those workers who have been most politically active, surrendering them to the leadership of republicans or middle class nationalists.

Imperialism has been able to offer Protestant workers real privileges compared to Catholics and it should be no surprise if many in government employment or reliant on subsidies such as Harland and Wolff see imperialism as their best hope. To offer an alternative to the insecurity, repression, unemployment and exploitation that imperialism represents for the majority of Irish workers a force powerful enough to challenge and defeat it is required. This power can only be the whole Irish working class supported in struggle by international solidarity, most crucially from British workers.

Confessional State

But the sectarianism which faces the whole Irish working class cannot be reduced to imperialism and loyalism in the north. In the 26 counties a confessional state dominated by the catholic church was created by partition and a fight for democracy and socialism in Ireland means destroying the political power of the catholic church. It means total separation of church and state with the ending of church control of education and health services. It means breaking the church's grip on social and sexual matters and its enforcement through state legislation. Such struggles have, and will in the future, have an explosive potential to undermine the most reactionary forces in Ireland, north and south. A blow against sectarianism in the south is a blow against sectarianism in the north and vice versa.

This does not mean however that such anti-sectarian and democratic struggles play the same role in the south as in the north. Some socialists like to show how non sectarian they are by claiming that the southern state is every bit as sectarian as the northern. This plainly and simply isn't true and saying this does not for one moment mean failing to recognise and condemn the confessional aspects of the southern state. However there is no 26 county equivalent of the massive discrimination against Catholics. There has been no 26 county equivalent of the 'B' specials and U.D.R. Hundreds have not been killed because of their religion in the southern state. There has

never been a one party government defined by religion. Most importantly sectarianism has not affected the working class as it has in the north. It thus follows that struggles against sectarianism will not threaten the very existence of the southern state as it has so obviously done in the north.

Reformist socialists put forward the demand of workers unity as the alternative to sectarianism but limit it to unity between Catholic and Protestant workers in the North. This is totally inadequate. The catholic working class in the North is in a deliberately created minority position with its political and economic power further weakened by discrimination. By itself it offers little alternative to Protestant workers supporting imperialism. This in turn reinforces the tendency for catholic workers not to look for workers unity but to subordinate themselves to the nationalist bourgeoisie. Only a programme of uniting all workers North and South offers an alternative to both Loyalism and bourgeois Nationalism. It would represent real proof that a Workers Republic would not be a 'Catholic Republic' where Protestant workers would suffer the sectarianism that Catholics suffer in the North. This is not 'Catholic workers unity', as its opponents claim, thereby revealing their own sectarianism, but the unity of all Irish workers that can finally slay the dragon of sectarianism. The mortal blow will come with the destruction of the Northern state and its imperialist master.

In order to defeat sectarianism socialists must have a programme at every level where it exists, from immediate assaults on workers to discrimination in employment etc., through to the sectarian state which defends both and the confessional state in the south which is an enemy not only of Protestant workers but most immediately of catholic workers. Socialists who refuse to confront it at all these levels can offer no way forward

7.

The Liberation of Women

The fundamental objective of socialism is the ending of all social oppression and exploitation. In advancing the liberation of humanity from such oppression there is no better measure of success than the elevation of the position of women in society. There is likewise no better measure of the continuation of general oppression than the continued oppression of women. This is dramatically true of Ireland.

The 1980's were a decade of defeat and demoralisation for many Irish women. In 1983 far right forces succeeded in enshrining an anti-abortion amendment in the constitution despite it being already illegal. This provided the platform from which to witchhunt all those who provided information on abortion, from womens' clinics to students' unions. Womens health books were removed from libraries and copies of the "Guardian" newspaper from Britain were seized as they were imported into the state.

Individual cases which hit the headlines are indicative of the

oppression suffered by many Irish women. Sheila Rodgers died in agony shortly after giving birth because no one told her of the dangers of pregnancy in her cancerous condition. This is absolutely in line with catholic church teaching which prevents action to save the life of the mother in such situations. Ann Lovett, a 15 year old schoolgirl died giving birth in a Grotto. Joanne Hayes also concealed the birth and then the death of her baby, subsequently 'confessing' to the baby's murder. She endured appalling interrogation and humiliation from the same state which has supported the climate of censorship and repression promoted by the catholic church and which forced her desperation. Church control of education was instrumental in sacking Eileen Flynn from her job as a teacher because, as a pregnant and unmarried woman, she refused to accept the narrow moral teachings of the church. In 1986 the referendum to allow divorce was defeated 2 to 1 and another victory was chalked up for reaction. These are only some of the recent landmarks in a society which has hidden the depths of womens oppression in religious censorship and hypocrisy.

However the 1990's have demonstrated that it is possible to halt the attacks on womens rights and reorganise the forces that can advance the struggle for womens liberation. In 1992 a 14 year old rape victim was prevented from travelling to Britain to terminate her pregnancy. The explosion of anger which resulted was expressed in mass demonstrations a feature of which was the involvement of young women. In one Dublin school two hundred young women walked out of school to demonstrate. The state backed down and in the subsequent referendum the right wing were trounced. Women won the right to travel to Britain to receive abortion and 60% voted to allow women the right to abortion information. The referendum also rejected the government's attempt to cancel the right to abortion where there might be a risk to the 'health', as opposed to the 'life', of the woman. Opinion polls have consistently shown a majority of Irish people in favour of abortion rights in certain circumstances. From a situation where mere mention of the word was taboo this demonstrates a momentous shift in Irish society. The catholic far right have clearly been thrown on the defensive and this was confirmed by the narrow victory of the Divorce referendum in 1995.

The explosive and controversial nature of womens rights and particularly sexual issues is illustrative of the particular type of society which

exists in Ireland, both in the south and north (where abortion is also more or less illegal). It illustrates the colonial history of the country and the legacy of this colonialism which endures in the semi-colonial structures of the southern state and society. The struggle for womens rights illustrates the change that is occurring in the lives of Irish women and their changing role in Irish society. It demonstrates the contradiction between these changes and Ireland's semi-colonial system.

A socialist programme for womens liberation must be capable of understanding this situation and of recognising that the rights of women and the demands of womens liberation will not automatically become part of the politics of the working class, or even of women themselves, unless they are fought for. Unless the lessons of the past are learnt and a conscious effort is made to advance the interests of women and develop their demands, the spontaneous struggles of the past will fail to provide an adequate leadership for the struggles of the future.

It is necessary to develop a programme for womens liberation because the working class, even in struggle, will no more spontaneously eradicate sexism and womens oppression than it will destroy capitalism and institute workers power. Even in the here and now the forces of clerical reaction continue to attack. Students are still under attack from S.P.U.C. for providing abortion information and the case of Anne McAnellan, sacked for being a lesbian, shows that legal rights are extremely limited. The struggle for even basic rights around questions of sexuality are far from over.

Origins of Womens Oppression

The origins of womens oppression demonstrate how fundamental it is to the inequalities of class society. Contrary to popular bigotry the subordination of women in present day society is not the result of nature or biology but a product of the development of human society itself. While the precise mechanisms are not certain it is clear that the development of woman's oppression is intrinsically bound up with the development of class society and that it was through the development of class society and its successive modes of production that the relationship between men and women became determined by the needs

of the exploiting classes and their economic system.

In primitive societies where there was no production above that which was needed to maintain bare existence there was no basis for the development of classes or systematic oppression of one sex by another. The growth of productivity and of a surplus provides the possibility of a class developing which did not have to work itself and could live off the surplus produced by others. It also provided the means for separating the responsibility for child care from that of society generally to families, which depend on the work of individual women, and which allows the perpetuation through inheritance of the class which has accumulated the wealth generated from the work of the exploited classes. A surplus allows a separate group of people to be established which protects the new unproductive exploiting classes from those who are exploited. These people are known as the state.

On these material foundations sexist ideas are generated which legitimise women's inferior status, ideas developed and supported by laws and religion. Thus the development of class exploitation, women's oppression and the state which defends both is intimately related. So too is their destruction and replacement by a society within which classes are abolished, women are liberated and the state withers away.

As private property owned by the new ruling class developed women too came to be regarded as the property of men, not just for unpaid work in the house but as producers of the next generation of the ruling class. Thus the word 'family' derives from the Latin 'famulus' meaning household slave and 'familia' meaning the totality of slaves belonging to one man. Women lost their independent role in society becoming confined to maintaining the domestic arrangements of men and rearing 'his' children. This loss of independence ensured that the oppression of women would continue as long as class society continued.

The role of the family is therefore central to understanding the oppression of women which is why the family and 'family values' are such an important part of right wing ideas and strategy. The family plays a number of vital roles in class society.

It is through the family that the sexual division of labour is primarily structured and reproduced. This division means it is women in the

home who care for and support the reproduction of the labour force. Without womens unpaid work in the home real wages would have to rise to allow these services to be purchased. The alternative of collective provision for children, the elderly or ill and infirm would cost capitalism dearly and would have to be paid out of profits. Women are a cheap substitute for such collective care.

This sexual division of labour defines women as subordinate to men making them responsible for domestic tasks and child rearing. From this flows all the sexist ideas that it is natural for women to be primarily housewives and mothers, that they are somehow naturally suited to domestic tasks and child care. Just to make sure however, they are often taught these tasks and skills at school.

The family itself is a vital mechanism for socialising the next generation of workers, disciplining them and teaching them to defer to authority, often brutally displayed within the home through the hierarchical family unit with the male at the head and women and children at the bottom. In society all social and sexual behaviour that does not conform to this increasingly untypical form is condemned and labelled unnatural. Not only womens demands for independence but gay and lesbian relationships are condemned for being unnatural even though the 'natural' nuclear family depends on a whole system of very unnatural state and religious regulations to maintain its existence.

When women do break out of the private and isolating confines of the home and enter the workforce, domestic drudgery is not escaped from but is added to by the work performed outside the home. This work is often merely a reflection of the household tasks they have just left eg. cleaning, nursing or other caring roles, or as teachers of children. Of course in this, as in all womens roles within the family, women from bourgeois classes can more or less escape by paying for domestic help and avoiding the need for waged work.

The role of the bourgeois family is primarily to reproduce and socialise the next generation of their class, maintaining the concentration of wealth that has been accumulated in the past. This does not mean that women from the middle and capitalist class do not suffer from oppression as women, it is to recognise that in so far as they are beneficiaries of the class system which maintains womens oppression

they can escape from many of its harshest features. This makes them at best unreliable allies of working class women seeking liberation from their sexual oppression and their enemies in the struggle from class exploitation. This does not mean we reject individual bourgeois women who are prepared to fight their sexual oppression but we recognise a definite contradiction which is theirs and not ours.

The family is often the institution which imprisons women; enforces endless and repetitive household drudgery; dependence on the husband, restricting their ability to develop outside the home, and often the site of extreme violence on both women and children. However it is often seen, especially in times of economic crisis as the 'heart in a heartless world.' The household drudgery is often seen by women themselves as a 'labour of love' or simply as their 'duty' as wives or mothers.

The family can often give real emotional support to working class people who face a hostile state and/or employer. But even when the values of the family are internalised, through women accepting their role as a subordinate wife or mother, the family is no real answer to the problems of working people. The 'labour of love' is still an endless round of stultifying cleaning, washing, ironing etc. etc. Emotional support often gives way to extreme domestic violence and divorce rates whether legitimised by the state or not are testimony to an institution in crisis. The number of people who remarry or who suffer on in broken marital relationships is also testimony to the fact that capitalist society offers no alternatives.

It is the purpose of socialism to offer such alternatives. To put it better, it is the purpose of socialism to create a society where everyone is free to find their own arrangements which best fulfil their needs for loving and supportive relationships, whether they be heterosexual or gay. It is not therefore the purpose of socialism to 'abolish' the family but to create conditions where the oppressive and exploitative nature of the present family is destroyed.

Central to arriving at such an outcome is achieving the complete equality of women in all spheres of society, not merely legal equality behind which real economic and social oppression still exists, but real liberation. Like the rest of the socialist programme it springs not from

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a utopian blueprint imposed from above but from the conditions and struggles of women in today's society. It will not only bring real freedom for women but also for men and children.

Women in Ireland

Women in Ireland are oppressed because they live in a capitalist society but this oppression is given particular virulence by Ireland's history as a colonial society and its present status as a semi-colony (26 counties). Ireland's past status gave strength to reactionary churches; the catholic church which was identified by the mass of the people as on its side, becoming the badge of the oppressed's identity and for some the emblem of nationality even while it closely collaborated with the imperial power. In the north the catholic church faced competition from reactionary Protestant churches acting even more as the bearers of political identity. In neither northern nor southern state has church and state been completely separated. In the north this has primarily manifested itself in sectarian state structures which because of dependence on a relatively secular imperialism has not been marked to the same degree by the anti-woman character of the southern state. This states' dependence on the catholic church for upholding authority in general and its own legitimacy in particular has been most acutely expressed through opposition to democratic rights in general and of national democratic and women's rights in particular.

The defeat of the national democratic revolution in the 1920's sealed the reactionary power and influence of the catholic church in the south and the reactionary regime in the north. The equally reactionary and anti-woman position of the majority of anti-treaty forces as displayed by Fianna Fail when it got into power shows that the only force that could have led the national revolution to a victory; a victory which would have been one for the democratic rights of all the oppressed, was a working class and socialist force. No such force was created and the creation of one today remains the key to the present liberation of women.

Nevertheless the victory of the most conservative section of the republican forces in the civil war and the failure of any radical movement to develop in opposition to it, greatly strengthened the most reactionary

anti-woman features of existing Irish society. A whole host of reactionary legislation was enacted in the new southern state to elevate the power of the catholic church and depress the position of women. Beside general repressive and censorial laws such as that against films in 1923 and the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929, measures were taken to prevent divorce, bar women from jury service and restrict womens employment. This was crowned in 1937 by section 41 of Bunreacht na hEireann which recognised the family as the **"fundamental unit group of society"**, as **"indispensable to the state,"** and **"in particular, the state recognises that by her life within the home, women gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved."** In the late 1940s the government of the state backed down from church pressure in its attempts to provide state health care for pregnant women. In 1956 the Civil Service Act legislated that the majority of women in the civil service would be required to resign upon marriage. Today while many of these laws have been repealed and equal pay and anti-discrimination legislation have been enacted, divorce has only recently been legalised on restricted terms, abortion is still illegal and contraception is still not easily available in many areas.

In the north abortion is more or less illegal and the churches have control of education;when it has suited them they have united against women to defend their views of morality. In 1945 the catholic church and Unionist M.P.'s united to close down nurseries arguing that they destroyed "the natural and divinely ordained traditional family."

The results of womens second class status in society can be seen in every aspect of their lives. Two thirds of women in the 26 counties are financially dependent on men or the state. This lack of independence reduces many women to a position of powerlessness and subordination, often socially isolated and constantly struggling against poverty and the psychologically stultifying burden of housework. When women do work it is often in part time and low paid jobs which offer less scope for advancement, poorer rights and legal protection, and often poorer working conditions. Women held 78% of the 96,800 part time jobs in 1987.

Despite equal pay legislation, at the end of 1987 average gross weekly pay for women in industry was 40% below that of the average male wage. Womens increasing role in the workforce has also led to increas-

ing unemployment; womens rate of unemployment tripling between 1971 and 1987, from 5% to 14% and even this is a considerable underestimate. The pattern of discrimination in new industries where employment has increased over this period shows that the disadvantaged position of women will neither disappear naturally nor be removed by any amount of equality legislation. Women are concentrated, indeed segregated apartheid style, into certain sectors of employment where wages are lowest. This segregation has increased over the last 30 years. In 1971 2/3 of women in the labour force were employed in service type jobs, in 1987 it was 4/5.

For many women getting into paid employment is a huge obstacle in itself, the main barrier being lack of child care facilities. In this area privatisation is almost complete, less than 2% of children under the age of six are in state funded nursery activity. Having gained paid employment women face another unpaid job in the house. A report in the mid-eighties estimated that an employed married woman's working week consisted of seventy hours as opposed to sixty hours for men. Maintaining a foothold in the labour force is made more difficult by the miserable maternity benefit which is among the lowest in Europe. All these barriers plus outright discrimination ensure that few women rise to the very top.

Alternatives

Despite the weakness of the organised womens movement in Ireland the demands of women have been too strong for capitalism to simply ignore. The strategy of the parties supporting the system has been not just to attack the most radical and fundamental demands of women but, by very selective promotion of women inside the bourgeois parties and creation of quangos and state initiatives, to present themselves as the leadership and voice of Irish women. These provide alternative vehicles for organisation exerting pressure on women to moderate their demands. This is exemplified by the Council for the Status of Women and state funding for womens activities such as rape crisis centres. The former seeks to prevent militant and socialist women from becoming the voice of the oppressed and the latter seeks to take the sting out of womens demands which raise opposition to the state, turning it instead into a dependence on it. Of course state funding for rape crisis centres

is in many respects a victory but if it is achieved without a continuing militant protest movement against the state it inevitably freezes womens demands at a position which cannot see a fundamental change in the conditions which oppress them. We can see these processes in equal pay legislation which, while it is undoubtedly a gain for women, also provides a bureaucratic avenue for addressing grievance, acting as an alternative to direct action by women themselves.

The only lasting and sure answer to either rape or unequal pay and conditions is a society controlled by working class women and men, where the oppression of women can be democratically discussed and the levers of power and the resources required to achieve change are in the possession of those who suffer the oppression. Bourgeois feminists seek only to promote the same class profile among women as among men so that there are more women T.D.'s or M.P.'s, more women 'entrepreneurs' and more women managers; and as we have seen in the north, R.U.C. policewomen being allowed to carry guns. To the mass of ordinary women and also to working class men this programme offers nothing.

For a short period in the 1980's republicanism also presented itself as a political banner under which women could unite to further their liberation. It has quickly become apparent that this is not the case. Republicanism has consciously stood against a woman's right to control her own body and fertility by gaining the right to have an abortion if so desired. When put to the test in referenda during the 1980's and 90's on divorce and abortion rights it fought shy of confronting clerical power. Even in its attempts to project itself as a standard bearer of womens rights it has revealed its bankruptcy. The first issue of its womens magazine displayed a quote on its front page declaring that while Irish women are oppressed as women it was their oppression as a nationality which came first. In other words women, like labour, must wait. In contrast the socialist programme can only be achieved if womens liberation is also achieved.

Like all movements which have suffered defeats the womens movement has been depoliticised. It has fragmented into separate campaigns with no unifying organisation and no shared programme. This is not just a reflection of defeat but a reflection of the class differences within the movement. It is extremely unlikely that a united movement under a

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middle class leadership will be created on the lines of the movements existing in imperialist countries during the late 1960's and '70's. The class oppression of working class women is too acute and the character of sexual politics too explosive.

Gender and Class

The full liberation of women is not compatible with capitalism. This can make the demand for such liberation a potentially revolutionary struggle and the womens movement a natural ally of the revolutionary workers movement. This does not mean that it is the job of the womens movement to liberate women and of the workers movement to end class exploitation. While supporting the right of women to organise autonomously we are not in favour of a separate womens political programme. It is not a question of working class and bourgeois women organising against a patriarchal system but of working class women and men uniting against capitalism. This means a womens movement devoted to real liberation must share the goal of working class liberation. Only working class struggle has the power to destroy the political and economic system which maintains all social oppression. Working class women suffer both class and gender oppression and will be most easily persuaded of this.

The need for a separate working class womens movement arises not just from the principle of the right of the oppressed to organise themselves, to ensure their demands are prioritised inside the socialist struggle, but also because, just as womens oppression predates capitalism, the destruction of capitalism, while a necessary condition, is not sufficient for liberating women.

Some socialists oppose the right of women to organise separately and claim it is divisive.

Apart from the obvious fact that women will organise independently anyway, they are absolutely wrong. It is analogous to socialists opposing the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. It derives from an economic view that the oppression experienced by workers is purely economic and only within the workplace at that. In fact workers face multiple oppression - from racism, sexism, national

oppression and so on. To unite against every oppression all sectors of the working class must recognise the right to liberation of those oppressed because of race, sex, nationality or whatever. Supporting the right of those so oppressed to organise separately is the only way in which a real unity of common interest can be forged.

It must be recognised that the divisions inside the working class are real material ones and do not just exist inside the heads of working people. This explains their power and the necessity for an almighty struggle against such divisions. It explains why a socialist programme of working class unity is so important; but such unity can only be on the basis of equality and a recognition of the rights of the oppressed. The most fundamental of these rights, on which all others are based, is the right to organise.

We cannot put an equals sign between the different ways men and women experience the division of labour under capitalism. It is women who suffer from sexual violence, enforced pregnancies, the responsibility of bringing up children, looking after the home and very often a job outside which is badly paid and exploitative.

If men contributed to household work on an equal basis to women their working week would be dramatically extended. We can just imagine the many 'socialists' who would protest loudly if the working week in the factory or office were extended without any increase in pay but who then go on to deny that men benefit from womens oppression in any way. Of course such benefits are marginal and immediate. They in no way compensate for a common oppression and exploitation and it is the duty of socialists to precisely point this out and demonstrate that while immediately it may seem to mens benefit to ignore womens demands, their historic, real and long term interests lie in a common struggle.

Men do not exploit women in any fundamental economic sense. Womens unpaid labour in the house, which reproduces the labour force, is free allowing a cheaper and more profitable exploitation of the working class by capitalism. On the other hand the status of men within the family divides and weakens the working class setting men against women and forcing much of the oppression suffered by working people into the confines of the family where it is often destructive of human relationships, and where it can be contained. The ability to see the need

for, and possibility of achieving, the destruction of capitalism is retarded. For all these reasons men do not have a decisive interest in supporting womens oppression.

A key question facing the women's movement is the question of alliances. While we support the right of women to organise autonomously, the need for alliances with the workers movement and other oppressed groups is crucial to achieving their demands. In the past sections of the women's movement have rejected the need for alliances [radical feminists for instance], but in practice alliances are inevitable. Rejecting alliances to the left has led in many instances to alliances to the right.

Women's organisations from around the world trooped off to Beijing to the UN's womens conference - implicitly accepting as sponsors of womens rights a Beijing government whose population control laws have led to the mass infanticide of female babies.

The question of alliances is one that will continuously face organised women. If it is evaded it almost inevitably results in absorbtion into the power structures that the womens movement set out to oppose.

Action Programme

The socialist programme for women is therefore not one to be fought for only by women but by the whole workers movement. It should demand:

1. Full legal, political and social equality for women. For an end to all discrimination against women, including single mothers. For an end to any concept of 'illegitimacy'.
2. For the right of women to control their own bodies through free and comprehensive access to contraception. For the right of women to free and legal abortion on demand.
3. Separate church and state, end church control of all education and health services. For free, immediate divorce on request from either partner with full state support for divorced women.

4. Against violence against women, including sexual harassment and rape. For the right of women to defend themselves against violence and no reliance on a sexist and repressive state.

5. For adequate and state funded 24 hour child care facilities which will allow women to really participate in society. For an end to the exploitation of temporary and part time workers. Full rights for these workers. Socialists stand for the full unionisation of all women workers and their integration into a new rank and file leadership of the trade unions.

6. For a working class womens movement that fights womens oppression and supports the struggle for socialism.

7. For an end to discrimination against lesbian and gay men and the violence against them that it legitimises. Socialists defend the rights of gay people to organise and defend themselves and to be open about their sexuality without fear of attack. We demand full support for gay rights in the workers movement.

8. For an end to the discrimination against young people. For full political, social and legal rights for those aged 16 and over including free and universal education, an independent income and full pay for young workers. The young unemployed must be organised by the unions and young workers integrated into the workers movement. Socialists support the creation of a mass revolutionary youth movement to fight for young peoples rights and against capitalism.

Only socialism offers a society free of all oppression, a society organised around human needs and not the pursuit of profit by a few. No other political programme offers all the oppressed the same vision of freedom and liberation

8.

The Environment

One of the enduring phrases to emerge from the environmental movement is the concept of the “Fragile Earth”. It’s totally wrong. The Earth isn’t fragile - it’s we the human race who are fragile. We can do an enormous amount of environmental damage but it is totally beyond our power to kill off life on Earth. We will be long gone before our activities could sterilise the biosphere.

Once we understand this we can define the problem of the environment. It’s not a problem of moral concern about the wave of mass extinction of other species - though’ that should be a concern - but the prospect of our own suicide as a species within the next few generations. The mechanisms of that suicide are all around us:

Depletion of natural resources - ores, fuels, entire living systems.

Pollution of Earth, Sea and Sky - of our own bodies and of plants and animals - often with substances that do not occur naturally and cannot easily be broken down by natural processes.

Loss of habitat and of plant and animal species. The Earth is becoming less and less suited for human life. As the environment degrades many species become extinct. We are linked to these plants and animals by flows of matter, energy and information. The living base of our own survival becomes simpler, more unstable - in a word more fragile.

There's no point in looking back to a golden past. There are many examples of environmental collapse in different human societies. The point is that these disasters were small - scale and localised and solved themselves by the eventual destruction of the communities responsible for degrading the environment.

Environmental problems are qualitatively different today. Now we face the globalisation of human impact on the environment, and this itself is a product of the unrestricted development of the capitalist mode of production.

Globalisation

All but an infinitesimal part of living activity on our planet is directly dependent on the amount of solar energy falling on the Earth and absorbed by green plants[the process of photosynthesis]. Today one species - our own - is estimated to consume 40% of that photosynthetic product. At this level we cannot simply exploit and compete with other species and leave them to fare as they may. To continue and extend the present level of human activity requires that we manage the global ecosystem. Such a task is totally beyond us at the moment and will take generations of effort to achieve - yet we are unable even to begin because we are unable to manage our own society and economy.

Already at this level we are unable to use natural ecosystems as a "sink" to dispose of dangerous pollutants. Levels are rising everywhere and alongside this is a global worsening of human health. In the last

generation asthma - its causes linked to pollution - has become a mass illness of childhood in the advanced capitalist countries. Recent studies claim that in these countries human sperm fertility has declined by up to 40% since the beginning of the century.

The motor for industrialisation has been fossil fuels. Over 100 million years of sunlight energy stored in coal and oil have been burnt in 200 years. The waste of complex and valuable chemicals involved in using oil as a fuel is staggering. The solution offered as these are used up has been a form of nuclear power based on bomb technology and producing the most dangerous and long-lasting pollutants of all. Meanwhile billions of tons of excess carbon dioxide have been released into the air, leading to a process of global warming and climate change that we can see already in progress.

It takes some thought and reflection to see how dangerous this process is. A temperature rise of 2°C doesn't sound like very much. Multiplied by the mass of the Earth it represents an amount of energy far in excess of the entire international nuclear arsenal. Energy in this amount builds up its own momentum. Whatever changes have already begun will take decades to work through the system - and it will take decades of massive investment by human society to even attempt to control the process.

Step number one in the fight to preserve our futures and our children's future is to recognise that the present situation does not arise as some spontaneous outcome of the rise in the size of the human population or simply from human progress and industrialisation. Damage to the environment is magnified many thousands of times, and our ability to act to correct that damage diminished many thousands of times by the capitalist system.

The logic of capitalist production is linear. The production line has an input and an output. It is organised for profit and recognises only direct money costs that it has to bear. This is in direct contradiction to the logic of nature, which is cyclic. Resources used up and waste produced must travel in closed loops through the environment until they can again be used. This logical contradiction means that the majority of production processes developed under capitalism cannot be amended

by it to fit into natural cycles - to become sustainable and ensure our own future needs.

The combination of all these private logics in the capitalist marketplace is not one global logic but complete irrationality. The need to maintain the rate of profit pushes aside all other considerations and becomes the only arbiter. Even when products are terminally dangerous nothing seems to stop their sale or dispersal. As the money machine runs on environmental disasters like Bhopal are presented as a kind of fate. The multinationals can flout the law with impunity and their victims lack even the power to win compensation or even a formal apology.

The Environmental Movement

The environmental movement goes back a long way and has some strange birthplaces. The first national park was established by the Nazi party in Germany. It's diverse sources, and the fact that it does not, as many of its supporters claim, rise above the class struggle, explains the range of currents in today's movement. On the far right we have eco-fascists who would happily see the destruction of most of present day humanity in the name of an imaginary god of nature. An influential section attempts to unite with capitalists as their advisors in the hope of controlling their worst depredations.

For Marxists the main focus of the movement is the large number of radical and youth elements who organise around ecological questions. The weakness of this layer is that it arose on the left among socialist militants who despaired of working class action in the face of Stalinist super-exploitation of the environment and the indifference of Trade union bureaucrats in the West. This leaves the movement without a strong programmatic base and open to continual pressure from reformism. On the other hand it offers an important opportunity - the chance to link up with a section of the scientific intelligentsia willing to break from capitalism. This layer was an important component of the working class movement in the '30s but was smothered by a combination of Stalinist censorship and western witchhunts.

It's this radical layer and the scientists who have linked with them who deserve credit for making the massive degradation of the global environment a matter of public concern. However the diverse nature of the movement and the denial by the majority of militants of a class base mean that they do not by themselves represent a solution to the problems they have identified. Without an overarching vision of an alternative society they are trapped. If they stay in protest politics they will become increasingly fragmented into single-issue campaigns - the evidence for this is all around us. The other road - pressure politics - degenerates into a role as advisors to capitalists who will then use environmental issues selectively to increase their domination of the planet without being able to provide anything more than bandaid solutions.

The Earth summit in Rio was a perfect example of the result of this kind of strategy. Built by environmental pressure politics in association with "environmental" billionaires in association with the UN, big business and the international elite, it did nothing to solve the problems of the planet. Instead it offered the imperialists some green pieces of paper to hide behind and the opportunity to pressure third world countries to prevent their own development so that the advanced capitalist countries could continue to have first rights on the world's resources. A first attempt was made to establish that the imperialists would own the genetic codes of plants and animals from the third world whose potential use they "discovered". A environmental fund was set up - under the control of the world bank! - Everything changes and yet stays the same! The 1995 conference on global warming was little different.

Are socialists in a position to speak authoritatively on environmental questions? After all, if there was anyone more reckless and irresponsible than the capitalists it was the Stalinist bureaucracy. The answer is yes - to the extent that they upheld the actual programme of socialism and opposed the fantastic and reactionary caricature of socialism that Stalinism represented. The Trotskyist movement has such a spotless banner and we make no apology for advancing our programme.

Uniquely we offer the only scientific method which will situate nature in with human society and explain the central role of the working class

in our own liberation and in a new relationship with the natural world.

Our very humanity arose and developed out of a struggle and interaction with the natural world. We can't go back to an idealised past. Having won some controls over natural forces we will not now give them up and allow climate, famine and disease to become again the fate of all humans. Yet that power has grown great enough that we can't now tinker with a system on the edge of chaos. We must go forward to develop a real control over the world or our own chaotic social and economic systems will become our fate and the fate of the world. This means that for socialists the environmental debate has a revolutionary conclusion - only if the working class emancipates human society can a real management of nature begin.

From a class perspective there are two mutually dependent forms of environmental degradation ; that of the rich countries and that of the poor - a division mirrored to some extent within each society. In the capitalist heartlands solidarity, creativity and community are all smothered. Formal democratic rights have less and less any method of expression. Freedom in these societies means freedom to consume, if you have the money. Part of the structure of human personality is some fulfilment in consumption - here it is bloated beyond all recognition by inequality, in some cases defining the personality of the consumer. Even here we can consume only from a range that preserves the appearance of limitless choice while actually imposing further and further limits on what is available - many varieties of food plants and animals are on the point of being wiped out by the standardisation of food to meet the needs of a small band of supermarket buyers. In the process materials and energy are wasted on a truly astronomic scale; packaging, design and the creation of private markets at the expense of public need. The US, with 3% of the world's population, uses 33% of energy resources. In most countries free public transport would cut energy use by at least 20% - yet the onslaught of capitalism is actually cutting back on these services.

For large sectors of the world's poor, whose standards of living can be measured in pence per day, the struggle for daily existence is so harsh that there can be no thought of tomorrow. Mass pressure of the destitute creates a devastating pressure on the local environment, and as the soil, water and energy resources degrade and cause further destitution so a downward cycle of destruction is set in train.

Relatively small amounts of capital, used to provide a basic economic security, develop sustainable systems and stabilise population would rapidly improve the situation. In fact over the past 20 years the standard of living of the world's poor has declined in both relative and absolute terms.

Over the same period capital has flowed from the poor southern countries to the rich northern in the form of interest repayments. When a much smaller amount of 'aid' flows the other way it filters through a local capitalist elite. As long as they keep order they are free to disperse money on arms, kickback payments and on showpiece 'development' projects that rarely meet local needs and involve a great deal of environmental destruction.

Over this rotten system stand the World Bank and I.M.F., enforcing a policy of privatisation and austerity which is bringing untold misery to the mass of the poor in the "Third World".

Who can look at this evidence and doubt the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues or the need to smash the capitalist system to ensure environmental stability?

The economic determinists of the new right claim that the market rules - that economics determine politics. In fact politics also determine economics. For example, classical economics makes no sense whatsoever. It has almost no predictive value, little explanatory value and is based on a number of impossible assumptions and processes that are not observed in the real world. Yet countless individuals are trained in the "dismal science" - its value as a weapon in the class struggle outweighs all its disadvantages. Academics have constructed "standard of living" indices which measure the extent to which working people are happy with their lives and included measurements of environmental degradation. What these measures show is a sharp fall in the quality of most peoples lives since the sixties.

Class Resistance

Workers don't have to wait until some golden future to have an effect. They can have an effect now. The threat of class resistance can drive back capitalism and force changes. This means defending public

services while calling for greater democracy and openness within these services. It means targeting the massive waste that arms spending represents and denouncing the fraud and waste involved in most western "aid" while calling for immediate repudiation of the debt burden on dependent countries.

A central demand should be that all social processes undergo an "environmental audit" based on real human need. "Social cost not private price!" should be our slogan. We should all be confronted with the real cost of the motor car - including the massive drain on resources and the source of pollution that it represents. The automatic translation of that cost into price - more expensive petrol, motorway fees or other "green taxes" is simply a way of ensuring that the workers pay through the nose while the rich continue to enjoy the good life and the environment continues to degrade. Energy efficient homes could cut carbon dioxide production by at least a third in most western countries - instead we are offered taxes on heating fuels! A true environmental audit could easily demonstrate that free public transport was less expensive than all the "privatised" alternatives. In fact, even under capitalism Edison Electric in the US has found it cheaper to supply a free energy efficiency service that build a new power station.

A radical policy by public sector workers in alliance with workers in the energy industry could win the support of large sections of the population and transform the balance of power in favour of workers and the environment.

A case study of this process is the nuclear industry in Britain. For years the Government paid the bill with tax money while claiming that nuclear energy was cheap. When they attempted to privatise it the environmental cost of waste disposal was exposed. It's important to note that this "cost" was generated politically - without strong "green" opposition the waste could have been buried with almost no restrictions. In the absence of a strong working class resistance the cost became a price - a "nuclear tax" stuck onto everyone's electricity bill.

It's worth making the point here that socialists do not automatically oppose nuclear energy - the problem is that every reactor in the world is based on bomb technology and the whole industry was built around the need of particular countries to acquire nuclear weapons. There is

the possibility of developing cleaner systems based on different technology and these should be explored.

Workers can make a difference here and now - but in the long term workers power is needed. A central environmental demand in the progress towards that goal is that processes be made sustainable. It's a demand that capitalist society cannot meet. It's a demand that will meet with apoplexy from trade union bureaucrats and Social democratic politicians anxious to protect the bosses and strangle democratic debate and action within the working class. It's a demand that will increasingly show workers, as they organise around it, the need to sweep away the present system and build a new socialist society.

Fredrich Engels once remarked that we could put no limits to the force of human productivity, but that under capitalism the productive forces were hampered and held back by the profit motive and by the tremendous waste of unemployment at one point being matched by labour speedups at other points while the entire system swung crazily from boom to bust.

Since then we have had to acknowledge the idea of natural limits and accept that the human population is approaching those limits. Yet Engel's insights retain much of their force. Until the middle of this century we could accept the extensive measure of population growth as a rough measure of the success of different systems. Now we must look for intensive measures of quality of life and a sustainable population limit. We need our full productive energies to accomplish this - and only the free and democratic control of our economic and social systems offered by socialism can deliver this.

9.

Revolution

Marxists are convinced that the working class is the only force capable of emancipating itself and the rest of society from oppression and exploitation. However Marx made the distinction between a 'class in itself' and a 'class for itself', between a class that exists objectively and a class that exists as an active and self-conscious historical subject, in opposition to other classes. Under capitalism the working class is separated from the means of production and to survive must sell its capacity to labour to the owners of the means of production. These relations of production distribute people into class situations and these situations entail essential antagonisms and conflicts of interest creating the objective conditions for class struggle. Class consciousness grows out of this process of struggle as individuals experience their class situation to be one shared by other workers. In this sense class struggle precedes class consciousness.

Working class struggle emerged before the creation of a politically

conscious or organised movement articulating a socialist alternative to capitalism. Spontaneous strikes for shorter working hours or for better wages and conditions created mutual aid funds, embryonic trade unions, within capitalism. Elementary class struggle and class organisation in turn produced oppositional ideas which are inevitable products of capitalist society. Class struggle is therefore not an invention of Marxists.

The capitalist class today prides itself in declaring socialism an anachronism. Yet how can this be anything other than self-delusion when class struggle is as intrinsic to capitalism as profit and the capitalist class itself? Wage labour will always be alienated while its needs are secondary to the pursuit of profit. Workers continue to be threatened by temporary or permanent unemployment and the fear of poverty in the event of sickness, infirmity or middle and old age. Wage labour is inevitably associated with gross social inequalities, whether wages are rising or falling they are forever spent in the main on immediate consumption. It is never possible to survive without constantly going back to the labour market, producing profit for the bosses. The success of gambling, not to mention all sorts of drugs both legal and illegal, is testament to the deep desire of workers to escape the present reality of their lives.

It is not surprising that the great majority of workers having become chained to the capitalist labour process remain alienated from their living environment. Men and women forced to sell their labour power therefore constitute the backbone of socialist change because the human need to overcome capitalist alienation is always present. It is the collective urge to escape such alienation that generates emancipatory ideologies. The events of May 1968 in France and Autumn 1969 in Italy demonstrate that even modern capitalism produces spontaneous rebellions without the aid of political conspiracy. The events of May 1968 came as a surprise and an embarrassment to the reformist and Stalinist left. Masses on the streets and a potential stark contest for power were the last thing the staid bureaucrats of the reformist political parties wanted.

In both France and Italy spontaneous protests by the workers went far beyond economic demands. In France this was attested to by the factory occupations and numerous political initiatives to turn the work

process upside down. Of course in neither case did these powerful mass revolts succeed in overthrowing the state or the capitalist system but workers will always have occasion to rise up against exploitation and alienation. However to achieve and then consolidate their own emancipation they need an understanding of socialist theory and organisation. Class struggle may be spontaneous but to direct it successfully to workers power and the shaping of a new society requires much, much more.

Reform and Revolution

Historically the workers movement has been bitterly divided over the questions of theory, strategy and tactics thrown up by the class struggle. All the divisions in the working class and the ideologies they have spawned - racism, sexism, nationalism etc. - have created real problems and ruptures. The most fundamental has been between those who believe capitalism can be reformed gradually and those who believe that only revolution can destroy the power of capitalism and usher in a new society. Unfortunately, as we have had occasion to repeatedly emphasise, the latter cause has been severely discredited by Stalinism which falsely held itself up as the inheritor of the revolutionary ideals of the Russian revolution; even while it crushed everything the original revolution and its organisers had fought for. Ironically it had its own reformist road, claiming the need for a democratic stage in any struggle before it could move to a direct contest for socialism. Around the world, including Ireland, this proved attractive to those nationalists who relied on workers to support their nationalist struggle while committing socialism to some ill-defined future. In Ireland, as elsewhere in the world, this meant not just the abandonment of socialist objectives but a failure to achieve real democracy as well.

The only alternative to capitalist decline which offers a complete solution from the point of view of the working class and oppressed is revolutionary socialism. For now progressive and oppositional tendencies are constrained by, among other things, the demoralisation caused by Stalinism. However we are confident that the current period of capitalist offensive will be overcome by the combination of the objective dynamics of the class struggle and the rebirth of the authentic revolutionary tradition - Trotskyism.

Numerous Stalinists have become hired propagandists for capitalism, not even so much as promoters of it, as denigrators of the possibility of a socialist alternative. This means that the history and legacy of Trotskyism becomes more important than ever. To give hope to new oppositions within capitalism means showing them that they do not start from scratch and can look to the past for example and inspiration. It means trying to find a much wider audience for the Trotskyist legacy than has existed so far. It would be a tragic mistake to attempt to bury Trotskyism with Stalinism as if both were equally redundant.

It is fashionable to say that economic conditions have changed so much that the prospect and even the need for socialist revolution is redundant. The capitalist market principle and parliamentary institutions are imagined to have integrated the working class to such an extent that no possibility for revolution remains. This view is not new. It was expressed during the period of the long boom after the second world war which was associated with an undeniable increase in living standards and social welfare. Yet that belief was turned upside down in the late '60's across many countries as the examples of France and Italy demonstrate. Marxism understands the world not through the fashionable theories which come and go but through a profound sense of historical development. This means that we do not take the most recent episode of capitalism, or a one sided feature of it, as the norm. The norm for capitalism, amply demonstrated over the whole of the 20th century, is one of wars, revolutions and counter revolutions. Nothing suggests this will change in the coming century.

Today's Stalinists sound very like the classical reformists at the turn of the century in the German socialist movement. Eduard Bernstein launched the famous revisionist debate in the workers movement by positing a growing decline in the severity of the economic contradictions of capitalism as a justification for reformist conclusions: less crises of overproduction, less tendencies towards violence and war, less authoritarian and more democratic government, fewer colonial wars. This was his prognosis. The reality of history turned the reformist's pipe dreams into nightmares. The First World War was only the beginning, the great depression of the 1930's followed; then the Second World War, the literally hundreds of wars that have raged across the globe since it and the current long recession which has lasted since at least the early

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'70's. Considering that when Bernstein wrote none of this had happened and capitalism did look to have some vigour, it exposes the present reformists as cynical liars, ignorant of history.

The historical sense that Marxism cultivates tells us that capitalism in decline does not follow a simple linear trend downwards and nor will it one day simply collapse in one great historical catastrophe. It has, and will continue, to follow contradictory movements. Periods of intense class struggle will give way to periods of retreat, defeat and pacification. There will be periods of economic growth but these will more and more fail to release the productive potential that exists in society and will continually be checked by capitalism's tendency to crises. Above all the potential for revolution that exists within the working class can never be removed and the history of the 20th century shows that given certain conditions this potential can become a reality.

The crisis of humanity evidenced by famine and war in the third world and growing inequality and poverty in the first and second worlds is, in the final analysis, a crisis of class consciousness and leadership. By this we mean that the problem of achieving workers power and the construction of socialism lies not in any insurmountable strength of capitalism or congenital weakness of the working class. It rather lies with the traditional leaderships of the working class who have betrayed revolutionary struggles by workers when they have taken place and instilled in them a severe doubt in the very possibility of a socialist society. Because their own reformist strategy relies on a strong capitalism and state this becomes reformism's primary objective.

Wilful misrepresentation has turned our argument into the silly charge that today revolutionaries believe that the only obstacle to socialist revolution lies in rotten leaders who always betray. On the contrary, at any particular point in time determining the precise obstacles to a revolutionary breakthrough demands a serious objective assessment of all class forces. Marxists do not presume that the working class is forever on the verge of revolutionary upheaval and we have never followed the simple minded theory that replacing the existing leadership of the class will, in itself, result in immediate revolution.

Nevertheless the crisis of class leadership and class consciousness is of prime importance. Over the last decade or so the parties of social

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democracy and Stalinism have deepened this crisis to the extent that many workers look to these parties , if at all, with reluctance and with little confidence they can provide solutions. Their only hope is that they can make things less bad than they might otherwise be. No revolutionary organisation is at the present time able to stir the consciousness of more than a tiny minority. A long history of disappointments and betrayals weighs down many working class militants who would otherwise be expected to play a key role in remobilising the mass of workers to fight for their own demands.

However capitalism constantly recreates the working class or creates new working classes which are not weighed down by the pessimism and defeats of the past. In fact not all workers have suffered direct defeats or at least have not faced the challenge of attacks on basic rights and conditions. New working classes in places like Brazil, South Africa or South Korea do not have the historical baggage of their counterparts in the imperialist countries. New workforces consisting of young workers and women may also provide potential leaders of the class struggle. Finally despite undoubted defeats of workers struggles in many countries the problems besetting capitalism have not been solved and this will necessitate more attacks on the working class. For the capitalist class an economic crisis is mirrored by a political one. They have their own crisis of leadership.

Transitional Programme

For workers to be won from social democracy and to acquire the consciousness necessary to conduct an uncompromising struggle against the capitalist state requires an understanding and embracing of the Revolutionary Marxist programme. While class struggle may be spontaneous a successful revolution is very definitely not.

Social democracy traditionally divided its programme into a maximum programme which promised socialism in the future and a minimum programme which sought reforms under capitalism today. There is however no link between the two and in practice only those reforms deliverable under capitalism were sought. Socialism is always for the

future while realism always demands compromises and sacrifices immediately. Even when this is not pure deceit, as it usually is, the failure by many revolutionaries to understand that there must be a programme that will link day to day struggles with the political conquest of power is a serious weakness. Some believe that simple uncompromising militancy in a revolutionary situation is enough to ensure success.

Trotskyists realise however that even the most militant struggles need to be politicised and given a dynamic towards workers power. This approach is known as the transitional programme. This in no way means discarding the demand for reforms. It is necessary to fight for all measures that benefit and strengthen the working class. But it does mean rejection of limiting demands to what is deliverable under capitalism and the separation of reforms from a revolutionary strategy. The bridge necessary to connect the struggle for reforms to that for revolution, from today's conditions and consciousness - no matter how militant - to the conclusion that the needs of the working class can only be satisfied by revolution, is the Revolutionary Programme.

The transitional method was explicitly formulated in a period of explosive confrontations in the 1930's although it was developed earlier by the Third International while it was still revolutionary. In such a situation a whole range of demands ranging from a workers militia to factory committees were developed for the purpose of bringing the class to a position of being ready to contest for power. The programmatic method does not fetishise a once and for all set of demands as some critics assert. Obviously the full import of various demands will only be effected in a revolutionary situation but this does not mean that they can only be used in these circumstances. In all struggles it is necessary to advance the consciousness of workers through the transitional method, ultimately to the understanding that a revolution is necessary. Waiting for objective circumstances themselves to convince workers of the need for revolution is to trail behind workers struggles and fail to give them the leadership they require. The purpose of the transitional method is to guide workers in conflict with the bosses so that the

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answer to their struggles is put to them as the conquest of political power by themselves.

The necessity of this conquest of state power and the creation of their own state will not be embraced by the overwhelming majority of workers without a conscious fight. Not one restricted to mere propaganda but one that is shown as a very necessity of their own immediate struggles. If the majority of the working class were able to make this connection themselves, spontaneously without the intervention of a programme, there would be no need for a revolutionary party and reformism would have been consigned to the political dustbin a long time ago. But all sorts of reformist answers will be presented to workers and, no matter how militant, the majority will not spontaneously rise above them. History conclusively demonstrates this. Without a long and conscious battle to win decisive sections of the working class to the revolutionary programme capitalism under threat will be able to make all sorts of temporary concessions which will leave its essential power intact allowing it to claim back the concessions later.

For this reason the essential dynamic running through the programmatic approach of Marxists is the need for workers to establish control over society. The point is not to demand concessions to be granted by capitalism but to establish the power to take them. Ultimately this means taking state power itself. The dynamic of workers control runs right through the transitional approach, from demanding the opening of the books of firms declaring redundancies to workers control of individual factories and offices and to the workers movement drawing up its own plan for the economy. It means the creation of worker's pickets and their right to arm and defend themselves as a vital weapon against the capitalist state's claim to the monopoly of armed force.

The particular demands put forward in any particular struggle are the concrete expression of the Marxist principle that the emancipation of the working class must be, and can only be, the work of the working class itself. This is counterposed to the election of a socialist government or liberation delivered on a plate by a 'peoples army.' Ireland more than most countries has seen the bankruptcy of both of these

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approaches. The decisive lesson that the revolutionary programme teaches is that the working class cannot emancipate itself using the existing state machinery but must destroy it and create a new state based on its own power.

The State

The state is a special organ that appears at a certain moment in the historical evolution of humankind and which is condemned to disappear with the end of class divisions. It is born as an instrument in the hands of the possessing class for the purpose of maintaining the domination of that class over the whole of society and it will only disappear with the overcoming of class domination.

Today the state is an instrument for ensuring the subordination of the working class to capitalism. Reformist socialists fail to acknowledge that the parliamentary state is only one particular form of capitalist class rule and that this class has repeatedly shown it can overturn the parliamentary form of rule in favour of dictatorship when it is convinced that this is necessary to protect the capitalist system. The stability of capitalist democracy is conditional on the acquiescence of the working class to rule by a state machine over which it has no control. A recognition by the working class that the state does not embody the 'general' interest or that of 'the country' but is an instrument of a particular class would lead the representatives of the capitalist class to abandon the pretence of neutrality by suppressing democratic rights and putting in place a regime which nakedly rules in the interests of the capitalist.

Reformist socialists who parrot the states claims to neutrality have been responsible for absolutely catastrophic defeats for the working class movement with horrific consequences for humanity. The trust placed in the democratic capitalists of Germany and its state played a decisive part in the coming to power of Hitler, the destruction of the German working class movement and of course the horrors of the Holocaust and the Second World War. The revolutionary alternative was rejected by the reformist leaders of the working class because of their rejection of 'violence.' As this and many other episodes have shown the danger of violence comes from a desperate and degenerate

social system based on inequality and exploitation. To reject its overthrow, by an armed working class, is not to stand for peace but is to guarantee bloody counter-revolution and the prolonging of the life of a violent system.

Typically when socialist parties achieved parliamentary ascendancy the capitalist respect for parliamentary democracy turned to contempt. It is not only worker's democracy that capitalists oppose. We have seen this in Britain in relation to Ireland when the Tories declared their opposition to Irish Home Rule despite it having a parliamentary majority, and stating that **'there are some things stronger than parliamentary majorities.'** Even during periods of stable political rule the elected bodies of the state are carefully checked by other unelected state institutions. Governments come and go but the executive elites remain. The capitalist state is, in the last analysis, the general staff and the special forces of the capitalist class: the military, police, top layer of civil servants , 'national security' bodies and the judiciary.

As a rule with the development of monopoly capitalism these executive agencies strengthen their power at the expense of the elected chamber as the functions of the capitalist state and its importance for the day to day running of capitalism increases. At the same time the state itself becomes more and more dependent on the capitalist class itself and is usually up to its neck in debt to the capitalist class and its banks. This is quite nakedly used as an argument to justify state policies, on the grounds that they will be favourably received by the 'markets', ie. the capitalists.

Besides being unalterably pro-capitalist by function (shown most clearly by those functions which it does not have, such as controlling the economy) and by the direct economic ties just mentioned, the state is capitalist in direct staffing terms. All the top state officials enjoy similar grossly inflated salaries when compared to workers. In Ireland it is taken for granted that the states' highest officials should have salaries comparable to the managers of big business. The project of European capitalist integration envisages further steps along the road to state independence from any sort of popular pressure through a toothless European Parliament and an independent European central bank. By independence is meant independence from popular demands but not from the seemingly all powerful and impersonal 'markets'.

Because even in its parliamentary form the capitalist state is still an instrument for exploitation does not mean the working class should be disinterested in the form that capitalist rule takes. Under a bourgeois democratic regime the working class has certain rights and freedoms which it must jealously defend but this should not be confused with the institutions of the capitalist state itself. All too often reformist socialists ask workers to sacrifice their own rights and interests in order to supposedly protect the outward institutions of parliamentary democracy. For revolutionary socialists the opposite is the case. The democracy which does exist in a limited number of capitalist countries is only defended because of the freedom working class parties and trade unions etc. have to organise and because of the more favourable environment in which to fight for socialism.

In periods of class confrontation workers can come to understand that the state always protects the rights of the bosses over those of the workers. No capitalist state calls out the police or military to ensure workers are allowed to picket. Even a socialist government would find that the state machine is not one that can be employed in such a way and that even the mildest reforms will be met with sabotage by the state executives and by investment strikes, cuts in production, removal of capital abroad and mass redundancies. This is why at times of heightened class struggle workers have been prepared to take direct action to defend their interests and have found that to do this they have to create their own organisations that start to perform tasks normally reserved for the state. From strike committees and factory committees, which begin to control the inside of the place of work, the challenge to the traditional instruments of power can develop into a 'dual power' situation in which the workers own organisations, historically in many countries workers councils or 'Soviets', can contest for state power itself. Such a situation can arise and is objectively posed when workers generalise solidarity over the whole country leading to a general strike, whether over a directly political issue or not. Workers action on this scale paralyse society and inevitably poses right away the question of how it is to be kept functioning, as a support for the workers action or as a threat to it. In such a situation the workers, to maintain their struggle, will inevitably, and very quickly, have to create organisations which begin to take control of the situation and which can resist the violent attempts of the capitalist class and its state to reimpose its authority. This then becomes a contest over state power itself.

This is why workers must be prepared for violence. Not because revolutions are bloody affairs, history shows they rarely are, but because counter-revolutions are nearly always so, involving as they do the armed suppression by a minority of the activity of the majority. In order to carry forward the workers struggle to success and even merely to defend themselves against reaction it will be necessary for the existing state machine to be physically destroyed, the sham parliaments, and more importantly the armed organisations of the state, will have to be physically destroyed as functioning mechanisms for the defence of the capitalist system. This may involve such tactics as attempts to win soldiers away from support for their officers and allegiance to the state and creation of an armed workers militia, but regardless of the precise combination of political and physical means, history has shown that the potential for bloody defence of the existing system is reduced by preparing the working class movement for armed defence. This in itself acts as a strong political argument demonstrating the seriousness and determination of the workers movement.

Revolution however is not primarily a question of armed insurrection, but of the mass of the working class and exploited taking control of society and being determined to defend itself in doing so. Unfortunately republicans in Ireland, and those on the left who have been influenced by them, have failed to understand this and turned the use of arms, often by very small numbers of people, into a strategy all by itself instead of simply a device totally subordinated to the self activity of the working class. This is fundamentally due to their objective not being the conquest of power by the working class, which would make the organisations of the working class the instruments of revolution, but the replacement of a foreign capitalism by a native one involving power continuing to be exercised by a minority. As James Connolly warned, often exactly the same minority of capitalist bankers and big businesses that previously held the reins of power. For this type of struggle an army separate from the working class, even if drawn from it, is entirely appropriate, hence the I.R.A.'s policy of defending private property against farmers seizing land and workers seizing factories during the Tan war. A leadership aiming at socialist revolution would have attempted to extend these actions to the whole country, not suppressed them.

The experience of Irish workers during this period as well as numerous similar experiences internationally is convincing proof that the working class cannot rely on any other social force to achieve its emancipation. Forces claiming to represent the 'whole people' such as the I.R.A. have proved incapable of understanding that peoples are made up of classes and that defending the 'whole people' has always meant defending the rights of the bosses. The working class must be the instrument of its own emancipation and no reliance can ever be placed on 'armies of the people.'

Since the Paris Commune in 1871 it has been clear that the working class cannot achieve liberation or construct a new emancipatory society by simply using the existing state machinery of capitalism. This flows not just from the necessity to fight this state to overthrow capitalism but also because the new society which socialists fight for is one in which the working class exercises direct control. The existing capitalist state is predicated on the vast majority of the population being excluded from real power. The answer to the problem of what form this new state should take has been given some answer by the history of workers revolutions. These have shown that it is the organisations which the workers have developed to destroy the old state that become the basis for the organisation of the new one.

The new workers democracy can therefore be nothing other than superior in democratic content to even the most developed capitalist democracy because it involves direct control over the functions of the state and real planning and control of the economy. The new state will therefore guarantee the right to work, to security of existence, free education and health care and decisively to adequate free time which alone can lay the basis for the equal participation of everyone in the governing of society. The governing and control of society will then no longer be the preserve of the capitalist class, their managers and the state elites.

This in no way demands the existence of only one party never mind one party rule. In fact freedom of political parties to organise is an essential condition of socialism to ensure the continuous involvement of the working class in political life. We therefore reject the Stalinist nightmare of bureaucratic dictatorship through a single omnipotent and monolithic party.

It would be comforting to say that the whole Marxist movement has also learnt the real threat posed to any revolution by bureaucratic deformations but the modus operandi of too many Marxist organisations proves otherwise. Nevertheless the tradition to which we belong has, and will continue, to uphold the democratic impulse behind socialism and reject any attempts to dilute the measure of democracy which we fight for in society and also practice in our own organisation. This means rejection of the notion of infallible parties or leaders, notions we are happy to leave to religion.

A socialist society will recognise the legitimacy of every party which respects the authority of the workers own state and socialists can have nothing to fear from the free competition of ideas which, as we have said, is the very essence of a society with the emancipation of humanity as its goal. Never again can the genuine socialist movement allow its banner to be confused by movements and ideas such as Stalinism which has its own share of responsibility for the rejection of socialism by many workers and the continuing survival of the capitalist system.

Concretely this means that the democracy of a workers state must go beyond the limited rights won by workers under capitalism. Freedom can only be guaranteed by the fullest participation of every worker in political and social life which itself can only be achieved by the speedy reduction in the time workers spend at their job. No qualitative steps can be taken towards self-government unless people have the time to administer the affairs of their workplace, neighbourhood or country. As long as the average worker spends ten hours a day at work or travelling to and from it, not to mention many women's second job in the home, they neither have the time nor the inclination to spend time at meetings or performing tasks within their workplace or community. Only the prospect of exercising real control over the life of one's community or workplace can offer the incentive for workers to seek direct participation in political life. A minimum of general culture deriving from a healthy and educated population is also required to make such a society work.

Skeptics will claim that such a society will not work but in the last analysis the only foundation for such a belief is an elitism which the new society will bury. Of course there will be mistakes but unlike today's society where mistakes are suffered by those who have no part in

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making the decisions which led to them; under the new society such mistakes will be quickly corrected precisely because those who suffer from them will be those who made them and now also in a position to correct them. It is perfectly possible using the resources and technology available to humankind to create the free time to allow the operation of a planned socialist economy and society in which the democracy expressed would be far in excess of the wildest dreams of capitalist society.

The Revolutionary Party

The socialist revolution is about creating completely new and consciously planned social relations and this can only become a reality as the culmination of workers struggles in capitalist society perhaps stretching over decades. Precisely because of the uniquely conscious character of the socialist revolution it requires not only conflict between the social classes but also a conscious leadership of the working class which gives it direction and a goal to fight for. This conscious direction is the role of the revolutionary party.

Creating a party that is capable of securing the trust and confidence of the majority of workers is only possible through a fusion of revolutionaries and the most advanced workers who have already proved that they can lead particular struggles. For the majority of workers class struggle is always kindled by matters of immediate material welfare. Thus the problem of a broad mass struggle becoming a revolutionary one depends on both a quantitative and qualitative factor. A revolutionary process develops when sufficient numbers of militant leaders on the basis of political consciousness already reached are able to lead broader masses into activity around objectives that challenge the continued existence of capitalist society and its state. Without previous protracted and consistent preparations, experience by tens of thousands of advanced workers and an accumulated knowledge of socialist strategy and tactics it would be illusory to anticipate spontaneous mass political actions being equal to the tasks of socialist revolution. This is the lesson of tragic episodes like the defeated German revolution after the First World War and many, many others.

The opportunity when the class struggle develops to the point where the

The opportunity when the class struggle develops to the point where the working class led by the revolutionary party is ready and able to seize political power occurs all too infrequently. The theory of the united front explains how revolutionaries can fight when they are still in a minority, in periods when there is no revolutionary situation, without dropping their revolutionary programme and strategy. The united front which revolutionaries propose seeks the maximum unity of the working class involving as many working class parties and organisations as possible in definite action which either defends working class interests or addresses key tasks which the working class faces. Historically revolutionaries have advanced this tactic in opposition to those reformists in the labour movement who have sought unity with capitalist parties. Examples today of this latter approach is the Labour Party's participation in coalition with any right wing party it can cobble a dirty deal with. The united front of purely working class parties or of such parties in alliance with politically petty bourgeois parties which are in uncompromising opposition to British imperialism in the north (such as Sinn Fein used to be before its capitulation to Irish capitalism) is thus directly counterposed to ideas of 'popular fronts' or 'broad fronts' which explicitly do not rule out strategic alliances with sections of the capitalist class. For socialists therefore there is no such thing as a nationalist family which should be united and we will always remain utterly opposed to any alliances with the parties of Irish capitalism.

The united front approach flows from the understanding that socialist revolution is only possible when a conscious majority embraces revolution. No small group or body can substitute for this. The minority which does believe in revolution must attempt to win a majority through winning its most militant sections first. The fight for a united front involving reformist leaders involves not just a commitment to action as opposed to words but also to unceasing criticism of reformism's unwillingness to consistently and comprehensively defend the interests of the working class and its ever present policy of seeking compromises with capitalism.

Nevertheless the primary purpose of seeking unity with those who do not believe in revolution is not to create opportunities to denounce them but to create possibilities of mobilising the maximum number of workers in struggle. Through such struggles reformist workers can gain a better appreciation of the need for revolutionary socialism than

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any amount of propaganda denouncing their leaders for reformism. The struggles themselves and any gains won from them create opportunities for revolutionaries to raise transitional demands which can develop the process in a revolutionary direction. United front or not the essential task remains the same, to develop workers struggles and consciousness to the level of that required to challenge for state power and socialist revolution.

The working class is not homogeneous in its consciousness and sections of class conscious workers can emerge and disappear with the ebb and flow of political and social struggle. Revolutionaries always seek to increase and develop the influence of these workers by orienting to them and attempting to win them to their ranks, even if this means on occasion coming into sharp conflict with the sentiments of the majority of workers who often have reactionary ideas on major political questions eg. when they support their own imperialism in wars.

Such a workers vanguard cannot persist without engaging in comprehensive political activity that goes far beyond the confines of a horizon limited to trade union demands. Revolutionary consciousness involves a universal understanding of class society and a commitment to oppose all oppression and exploitation. This is what lies behind Lenin's assertion that the model of the revolutionary is not the trade union secretary but the tribune of the people.

We must therefore reject the view that the working class can overcome all the obstacles to understanding the need for, and what is involved in, creating revolution without party organisation. We must also reject the idea that there are infallible parties, with the answer to everything written in a book, unwilling to learn vital lessons from the spontaneous activity of the working class itself. In fact the revolutionary party exists to learn these lessons, theorise them and make sure that they are not forgotten and properly remembered. To carry out these functions the party must have formal and coherent mechanisms for making decisions and these mechanisms will fail completely if they are not characterised by the fullest democracy.

As we have made absolutely clear in no way does the concept of a vanguard party imply the existence of only one party. Rather it is about various different parties , groups and currents competing for the

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and tactics. The freedom to establish groups, tendencies and parties without restrictions is a precondition for the very existence of a socialist society. No socialist programme is a gospel of truths and social reality changes making review necessary again and again. New and unforeseen developments regularly occur and under such circumstances restrictions on free debate and organisation constitute obstacles to understanding and progress.

Once Again a Party

Trotsky once said that "**for success three conditions are required: a party, once more a party; again a party.**" The revolutionary party is not an amorphous body of lukewarm sympathisers, it is one of activists or cadre which aims to organise the most class conscious workers in a vanguard with a revolutionary political outlook. The real revolutionary party if it is to represent the whole working class must have a mass membership and cannot be declared by small organisations with their own inevitably partial view of the class. Its membership must be selected through the various tests thrown up by struggles and the political debates and controversies these create. It is simply not credible to attempt to leap over training and education by experimenting with open enrolment in an attempt by small organisations to find a short cut to becoming a real force in society.

The mass revolutionary party is the answer to the contradiction pointed to by Marx when he declared that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself and that the ruling ideas determining social consciousness under capitalism are the ideas of the capitalist class. In this sense the party is like a university which educates its own members and seeks through their intervention into the class struggle, primarily through the most advanced workers, to win the mass of the working class away from support for all the reactionary ideas which infuse them under capitalism. These ideas range from reactionary nationalism, sectarianism, racism, sexism, and support for right wing parties; despair of an alternative to the 'free market' and capitalism; or complete disinterest in politics and concentration on a private life which alone seems to provide meaning and answers. There is no spontaneous process which can challenge all these ideas and attitudes within the working class, only conscious

intervention by a revolutionary party can set itself this task. For the majority of the class it is only action led in a revolutionary direction which will prove the correctness and practicality of revolutionary socialism.

It is in this sense that it has often been quoted that an ounce of practice is worth more than a ton of theory. Too often however this has only been a justification for wrong or inadequate practice resulting from a total lack of theory. The development of such theoretical practice can again only be the result of full democratic debate within the revolutionary organisation. Just as outside the party there must be mechanisms which promote democratic debate so must there be mechanisms to do this within the party. Such mechanisms involve the right of party members to form organised tendencies and factions within the party.

Unfortunately even most organisations which claim allegiance to Marxism and who denounce the Stalinist strangling of democracy within the Russian Bolshevik party hypocritically do not allow tendencies and factions to exist in their own organisation. For small revolutionary organisations with little influence, but with hope and confidence in their future, the only existing and practical arena within which they can show their commitment to democracy is within their own organisation. That most do not practice democracy within their organisation is admission that they do not in reality understand what socialism is about and could not be trusted to lead the majority of workers in the creation of a new society qualitatively more free than the existing one.

A tendency is a group of members who organise within the party to change some aspects of party policy. A faction is a group who unite under a radically different policy platform for the organisation and propose to completely replace the existing leadership. Both must have the right to promote and disseminate their ideas within the organisation and have the freedom to campaign to win members to their views. In turn the leadership of the organisation must reflect the strengths of these alternative views consistent with the ability of the majority to decide policy. Thus with these rights come the responsibility of minorities to respect the decisions of the majority and to implement its policy in the interventions of the organisation.

At the end of the day the only guarantee of democracy in a revolutionary party is a highly educated (in Marxism) and active membership which thinks critically about politics and refuses to simply accept the word or received wisdom of the leadership. Unfortunately, again all too often, the small revolutionary left has been populated by members who pride themselves on a rigid adherence to their own leadership and who refuse to critically study and debate not only their own leadership's political positions but that of others. Such rigidity is often seen as a strength but it is a strength which is brittle.

Acceptance of Marxism and membership of a revolutionary organisation is not an invitation to leave one's own ideas at the door. It is an invitation to develop one's knowledge and critical faculties with others dedicated to the same goal. Joining a real revolutionary organisation does not close the door to development but should be the stairway to the discovery of the real laws and mechanisms by which present society works and how it can be changed for the better.

The International

Construction, at one and the same time, of revolutionary mass parties in each country - rooted in their national struggles - and of a revolutionary international is for socialists a question of principle which corresponds to the objective conditions of imperialism. Simply participating in international solidarity, supporting struggles in other countries and exchanging experiences, however necessary, are insufficient in themselves. In an inter-dependent world internationalism is not simply a moral imperative, it is an immediate strategic necessity. The objective need for a process of world revolution has received new and urgent importance through the growth of the destructive potential of contemporary capitalism. The accumulation of huge stockpiles of nuclear and chemical weapons; the predatory actions of multinational companies; the new gunboat diplomacy of imperialism dressed up as the 'international community' and the destruction of the environment can only be stopped by international action. All this simply reinforces the long standing claim of the genuine Marxist movement that it is impossible to achieve socialism in a single country or in a small group of countries. We have made clear that this does not mean that a socialist

revolution cannot begin in a single country. Rather it means that in the course of such a revolution the new regime will be subjected to international capitalism's economic, military and ideological competition. While beginning in one country it must immediately link its fortune to the international class struggle which must culminate in the victory of socialism worldwide or inevitably be crushed or succumb to bureaucratic degeneration as in Russia.

Without an international organisation of parties individual national parties will sooner or later adapt to the particular weaknesses and prejudices of their own working class. Some socialist organisations think they can escape this by creating organisations around the world that are clones of a parent organisation. This has particularly been the case with British organisations. In these cases no genuine international has been built and the particular weaknesses or national peculiarities of the 'mother' party have been reflected in all the organisations created. Construction of a genuine revolutionary socialist international means simultaneously building national parties in each country and of a genuine international. Of course this will be small but this cannot be an excuse for refusing the task; national organisations will be small initially as well.

The size of socialist organisations is clearly a decisive factor in determining the real effect revolutionaries can have on politics in any one country and the wider world. It is not the decisive factor in determining whether any one individual should commit themselves to joining a particular organisation. Big organisations with the wrong ideas or strategy may have more immediate effect on the class struggle but their weaknesses will translate into failure, all the more grievous the bigger they are. Aside from the gratification from committing oneself to a course which one knows is right the objective reward for committing yourself to Marxism is the knowledge that only those who can learn from history can really change it for the better. The need for an international organisation was understood by Marx, by Lenin and by Trotsky and it is a lesson too few understand today.

In part this is due to the failures of previous attempts to build international organisations. The experience of the Communist International after Lenin's death, with changes in policy and of leaders

dictated by a degenerate central bureaucracy, has aroused determined suspicion towards international organisation. The equally disastrous experience resulting from the failure to make a distinction between the party and the state, or subordinating workers struggles internationally to the supposed diplomatic interests of a 'socialist motherland' - Russian or Chinese, has reinforced concern for retaining national independence among a number of revolutionary organisations. These are dangers to be guarded against but they are not reasons to abandon the project of building a revolutionary socialist international.

We know that building a mass revolutionary international will be an immensely difficult and protracted task. The organisation to which we belong, the Fourth International, set up by Leon Trotsky in 1938 is by no means perfect. However we are committed to it as the best framework from which to fight for the mass revolutionary international that is necessary to achieve socialism around the world. There is no more principled and worthwhile task - join us in it!

AFTERWORD

This book represents a lot. Not least two years work by each of the authors and additional work by other members of our organisation.

It also represents the experience of our members, stretching back over 30 years in a forgotten struggle - the mass and class action of tens of thousands of people represented by struggles such as; Civil rights, internment, H-Block, the womens movement, opposition to social partnership and solidarity with many international struggles.

Finally it represents our understanding of the collective experience of working class struggle across the globe over the past two centuries; from the days of Marx through to the Bolshevik party and beyond to the international left opposition to Stalinism and to todays links between Socialist Democracy in Ireland and the Fourth international.

Yet for all that our programme is not a bible. It's incomplete. It overgeneralises. Further experience will, we are sure, expose its weaknesses.

What we ask from you, the reader, is not uncritical endorsement but critical acceptance - the recognition that the central ideas of our programme can not be refuted by any dispassionate or scientific critique.

That recognition puts an onus on you, the reader.

Do you want information about the rest of the story - the further development of our programme and its application?

Do you want to take a step further by becoming a sympathiser and making a physical commitment to turning our programme into reality?

Finally are you someone whom we might consider for membership? Able to critically understand the programme, help revise it, apply it to new circumstances and with enthusiasm and dedication to give of your time in advancing the struggle of the working class?

In other words are you a militant? Someone prepared to sacrifice time, money and effort for the creation of a socialist alternative?

The life of a revolutionary has many difficulties. In compensation it offers real clarity of understanding about how the world works and an opportunity to shape the course of history rather than be swept along by the tide.