

After Warrington

A new Peace Movement?

Des McCarron

1993

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Dublin Sunday March 28th. On a rainy afternoon about 20,000 people (Irish Times estimate) crowd O'Connell Street to protest at the deaths of two children, Jonathan Ball and Tim Parry. At the fringes of the rally a small group carry pictures of some other victims of violence. Fergal Carahers's widow holds a placard saying "also, remember, British soldiers killed my husband". Others hold pictures of Majela O'Hare, Aiden McAnespie, Seamus Duffy, Karen Reilly and other victims of security force violence in the North.

A small section of the crowd reacts angrily and begins to heckle them shouting "out, out, out!". Gardai move in quickly to grab the offending placards. In death as in life it seems that some are more equal than others.

The Peace 1993 movement was set-up after the Warrington bombings as people reacted angrily to the killing of innocent children. Their efforts to distance themselves from politics have not been entirely successful. Attempting to mould the peace movement in their own image were New Consensus and the Peace Train Organisation.

These organisations are little more than fronts for the Democratic Left, Workers Party and others who see the IRA as the incarnation of all evil. They are partly financed by the British government, through the Northern Ireland Office (see 'Peace train runs out of steam' Workers Solidarity 33). The people involved in Peace 1993 events have the best of motives and are sickened by the violence on all sides. Unfortunately they are being used.

GANGSTERS AND PSYCHOPATHS?

Peace 1993 has started with the analysis we are offered again and again by our rulers and the media. Paramilitaries, especially republican ones, are portrayed as gangsters and psychopaths used and manipulated by cynical "godfather's of crime". It is because of the IRA (we are told) that "normal democratic politics" cannot proceed. If they were to lay down their arms everything would be Hunky-Dory. Unfortunately this is not the case. Indeed the ceasefire of 1975 between the British government and the IRA was broken unilaterally by the British. They used the opportunity to conduct raids and searches for arms, and provoked the republicans in every way possible. The ceasefire was not signed by the loyalist gunmen who stepped up their sectarian campaign.

Sinn Féin's electoral support is 10% in total and 30% among Northern Ireland Catholics, concentrated in the working class areas of West Belfast and Derry and among small farmers in the border counties. The IRA have no difficulty in recruiting young Catholic workers and unemployed and will continue to do so. They are not the problem, they are a product of the real problem.

This is the Northern Ireland State. There can be no "normal politics" in Northern Ireland. This is a State founded on blatant sectarianism and the repression of the minority. Catholics are still twice as likely to be unemployed as their Protestant neighbours (according to the government's own Fair Employment Agency). This is combined with day-to-day harassment by the security forces and the recent acceleration of sectarian attacks. These are the conditions that make it very unlikely that the IRA will just disappear.

POLITICS OR POND LIFE?

The IRA are a response to a State that was a model in sectarianism. The British State succeeded in buying off Protestant workers with marginal privileges. They created the reactionary ideology of unionism. Normal politics in Northern Ireland is illustrated graphically by the activities of the Belfast city council which recently took another giant step into the dark ages when it renewed its ban on over 18s films on Sundays. The normal politics of this council chamber was described as “more like pond-life than politics” by one recently resigned SDLP councillor.

As long as the British occupation continues and as long as unionism is propped up by them, so-called normal politics in Northern Ireland remains in the realm of sick humour. The IRA are not to blame for the situation in the North. But they will never be able to change it.

The armed struggle over the last 20 or so years has done little more than irritate the British and Irish governments. A small guerrilla army will never defeat the combined resources of the British and Southern Irish States. Like all small guerilla armies they are elitist and unanswerable to those they claim to represent. The only role they offer Catholic workers is to cheer on from the sidelines.

No group of this nature no matter, how brave or well armed, will ever set us free. Ultimately the armed struggle is no substitute for mass action. The only way to fundamentally change things is by uniting workers North and South of all religions and none to defeat the bosses, orange and green, and build a secular worker's republic.

WINNING SUPPORT ...FOR MORE REPRESSION?

The so-called economic bombing campaign in Britain is another reflection of the IRA's political bankruptcy. Any serious socialist anti-imperialist group would attempt to enlist the support of British workers against their own ruling class. The IRA's simplistic strategy is that they can bomb them into submission by causing massive economic damage. In fact it alienates British workers and makes the introduction of anti-Irish laws like The Prevention of Terrorism Act that bit easier.

And it has to be said that the IRA know well that the authorities will occasionally ignore or delay a bomb warning in order to whip up anger at the Provos. With this knowledge it has to be said that the IRA take a very cavalier attitude towards the lives of ordinary people every time they plant a bomb in a shopping mall or railway station. It would not be unreasonable to ask if their bombing of Warrington amounts to manslaughter.

The economic bombing campaign of the last 20 years from the Birmingham pub bombs, through the attacks on Downing Street, the stock exchange and the recent massive attack on the Nat West tower have not shaken the British government's resolve. Despite the cost (the Damage from the Nat West bomb is estimated at £3-500 million or about 1/10 of the annual bill for running the North for a year) they still hang on.

MORE PROGRESSIVE THAN THE LEGION OF MARY!

Anyone waiting eagerly to hear radical ideas from the IRA's political wing, Sinn Féin after the slight relaxation of Section 31 (of the Broadcasting Act) forced on RTE can stop holding their breath. Take womens' rights for example. At this year's Ard Fheis a motion was put forward

committing them to support a woman's right to choose abortion. One delegate (Daisy Mules from Derry) in support of the motion said that "the struggle for human rights and democracy must include womens' rights which includes the right to choose".

The party's ruling Ard Chomhairle had different ideas. Tom Hartley claimed that existing policy was "the most progressive held by any political party in the country" (Not true, of course, both Democratic Left and the Workers Party have gone further in their limited support for abortion rights). Gerry Adams claimed that to change policy "would be the biggest mistake we could make this weekend". The motion was defeated (*An Phoblacht/Republican News* 25th February).

Sinn Féin's politics continue to be based around a desperate attempt to make friends with right wing nationalist elements like Fianna Fáil TD Michael Noonan and the SDLP 'grassroots'. This strategy has failed totally and their vote in the South remains minute.

The truth is that neither Peace 1993 nor the republicans can change things. Their simplistic solutions of "Lets all put down our guns and be pals" (unless we happen to have uniforms) or that of a united capitalist Ireland underline the lack of ideas of both organisations. Not only have they no solutions they haven't even begun to ask the right questions.

WORKERS' ACTION

Our solution is not quite so simple. It is a longer and more difficult route, but it is the only one which will work. It involves uniting workers in Ireland to fight for a united anarchist republic.

In the short-term this means supporting and building, where possible, united action against the bosses. Also where united struggles do take place trying to make connections showing how the only way to real unity against the bosses is to oppose partition which is used to keep Protestant and Catholic workers apart. In the long-term it means fighting both British imperialist occupation of Northern Ireland and our own native bosses and Southern clericalist laws. The only way to do this is through massive united class struggle. There are no short-cuts on the road to freedom.

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