

# Ireland: Labour's Bloody Years

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Despite all the sabre rattling between Callaghan and Thatcher in the run up to the election, one issue provoked no lively debates, no clashes where Labour 'lefts' could let off a bit of anti-Tory rhetoric. That issue was Ireland.

For ten years, on no other single issue has there reigned such perfect unanimity between the two sides of the House of Commons. In Labour terms this permanent truce goes by the name of bi-partisanship. One can say with certainty that where Labour is found hand in glove with the Tories it is not the latter who have abandoned the interests of their class.

Whether British repression was handed out by the cold blooded hypocrite Rees, or the gruff torturer Mason, the message for the anti-imperialist population of Ireland has been identical. The over-flowing jails, the systematic use of torture, the SAS assassinations and the brutal searches are a constant reminder to the Catholic population that the Labour Government, like the Tories, works entirely in the interests of British imperialism.

It is not merely the unshakeable unanimity between Callaghan, Mason and Thatcher that is so striking. The Tribune Group, decrepit, but still in existence, has with one or two exceptions, a contemptible record of silence, or, even in the case of Stanley Orme, total complicity in imperialism's deeds in the North. Eric Heffer could write, concerning Soviet dissidents, that the Labour left "must give their support to human and civil rights everywhere, whether it is in Northern Ireland or the Soviet Union." Well said, Mr. Heffer! As the author of a book called 'The Class Struggle in Parliament' when did you last, in Parliament, vote against the Prevention of Terrorism Act, move a motion of censure on the Government's Northern Ireland policy? We will limit ourselves to possibilities within the bounds of Parliamentary procedure - not expecting you to create unseemly incidents in the manner of Bernadette Devlin.

In fact the overwhelming majority of the Tribunites have shown little or no interest in the activities of their Government in Ireland. Even those handful who are willing to condemn Britain's role restrict themselves to a few questions and the sponsorship of the occasional conference or tribunal.

The continued lease of life of Callaghan's minority Government hangs partly on concessions made to the Ulster Unionists, and their spokesperson Enoch Powell. What these may be is not yet known, beyond the already announced bolstering of the Orange bigots by the increased allocation of MPs to N. Ireland.

What lies at the root of Labour's slavishly pro-imperialist policy with regard to Ireland? Fundamentally it lies in the failure of the 1960s policy of the British ruling class which envisaged a gradual liberalisation of the sectarian statelet in the north as a prelude to the eventual re-unification with the South - now outstripping the 6 Counties as a magnet for British investment. The feeble moves towards liberalisation foundered on the Orange backlash. Lower middle and working class Protestants totally refused to give up their privileges in jobs, housing and the monopoly of political power. Nor could these moves meet the elementary

demands like 'one man, one vote'"jobs, houses, etc. Seeing that these things were impossible as long as the sectarian statelet existed, the Catholic masses undertook the struggle to smash Stormont, and spearheaded by the IRA, they succeeded.

Britain committed its army to the hilt to contain and hurl back the advance of the anti-imperialist population. At the same time it had to defuse the situation by 'power sharing' i.e. the inclusion of a few SDLP politicians in a N. Ireland Executive. The response of the Protestant paramilitaries was the Ulster Workers strike of 1974 which shattered the power sharing Executive. Events demonstrated the usefulness of the British Army as a weapon against Orange sectarianism and clearly revealed that it was fundamentally on the same side as the bigots.

Labour was left without even the democratic fig leaf that Heath had of pressing on towards a solution. Callaghan has and can have no solution other than more blood and more repression. Its purpose is the total exhaustion of the anti-imperialist struggle and the isolation of the IRA - its 'criminalisation'. Thus the development of the techniques of repression serves an immediate purpose integral to British strategy. They are not inhumane excesses' which can be reformed whilst leaving troops in Ireland. Also they have, a longer term purpose. N. Ireland has become a grisly training ground for the British Army to develop the methods necessary to use 'at home' when the going gets rough. Thatcher and the trogladite Airey Neave may shriek for further repression but they represent only a difference of degree - a degree that Mason will concede to the army chiefs tomorrow if he does not do so today.

It is in the direct interest of the British working class to bring an end to this shameful record - performed in the service of its own enemies, the British bosses and bankers, but in the name of the British Labour Movement. N. Ireland is an armed citadel of reaction.

There the troops are trained, the tactics are evolved, the weaponry developed, all under the disguise of 'Anti Terrorist' measures, which will be used to intimidate and destroy the British Labour Movement and Irish resistance. The heroic struggle of the Catholic population is against our major enemy. The British Labour Movement's support and assistance to them is shamefully long overdue.

## Solidarity

For those who call themselves revolutionaries in Britain it is obligatory to declare unequivocally our support for the IRA and their struggle to drive the British forces out of Ireland. We do not place a as a condition of this support that the IRA become socialists or that we approve of their tactics.

In our view the republicans are politically not a party of the Irish working class. Certainly they are not revolutionary communists. We have the sharpest criticisms of many of their tactics. But our criticism is not designed to get us off the hook in the face of chauvinist 'public opinion'. Its aim is to assist in developing the strategy and tactics in Ireland and Britain that will help rid Ireland of 'our' imperialists forever.

Since the only force in Britain which has the potential for breaking the murderous grip of successive governments is the working class we fight for a central orientation towards the trade unions and the rank and file in the Labour Party. There we seek to build a united front of all those willing to mobilise to achieve the immediate withdrawal of the army of occupation, the repeal of the PTA and the release of all Irish prisoners of war, and the recognition of the right of the whole Irish people to determine the fate of the six counties free of all British interference.