



IRSM argues for a peaceful political struggle in Ireland

Bernie McAdam Sat, 17/10/2009 - 16:01

Bernie McAdam

Bernie McAdam argues that the the Irish Republican Socialist Movement has taken a step in the wrong direction, spreading the illusion that a "peaceful political struggle" can unite Ireland

The Irish Republican Socialist Movement, which comprises the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), has issued a statement which declares "that the armed struggle is over and the objective of a 32 County Socialist Republic will be best achieved through exclusively peaceful political struggle?". The statement goes on to fully support "the move to build a left wing party that has a clear objective of a 32 county Socialist Republic" and to "build a left political alternative in Ireland and support the struggle against global capitalism?".

INLA has been on a ceasefire for the past 11 years. The IRSM quite reasonably concluded that the failure of the guerrilla campaign against British forces and the ever withering support for it demanded a new orientation. This was correctly viewed within the context of rejecting the Good Friday Agreement which saw the historic sell out of Sinn Fein to British Imperialism. This latter act was copper fastened by Sinn Fein's power sharing with the Democratic Unionist Party in government, supporting the notorious sectarian police force PSNI and decommissioning arms under the supervision of the imperialist de Chastelain decommissioning body.

Whilst the commitment to a peaceful road to a united Ireland is a dangerous illusion, the IRSM's call for a new left wing party is to be welcomed. A conference to discuss the building of a new anti imperialist and anti capitalist party in Ireland should now be called. The depth of the crisis facing Irish workers demands a new party active in all the struggles of workers, not just an electoral alliance. There is an urgent need for a conference of the left to discuss a new political party of the working class where different tendencies can co exist.

How can Ireland be united?

In any new formation that emerges Workers Power will fight to ensure that any programme adopted will argue for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. In doing so we would necessarily reject the notion now being argued by the IRSM that either the removal of Britain from Ireland or the establishment of a Workers' Republic can be achieved through "exclusively peaceful political struggle?".

This is a totally mistaken conclusion drawn from the failures of the guerrilla war that was waged by the Republican movement before the Good Friday peace agreement. Capitalism is a system wracked by war, oppression and exploitation which does not allow for the luxury of a peaceful challenge to its rule. Even the meagre demands of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement were met with the batons of the RUC and physical violence by loyalist thugs. If the British soldiers left it would only be because they had broken the Republican movement utterly and crushed any prospect of further opposition to the existence of the six counties.

Revolutionary socialists have no illusions in a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism. The rich and powerful will not surrender their positions of power without a struggle. The Bolshevik Revolution with its workers militia, workers councils (soviets) under the leadership of a revolutionary party testify to the necessary role of force in a revolutionary situation. As workers move into battle with the bosses and their state they will develop their own means of defence whether it be defending their picket lines and occupations against state forces or defending communities under attack as in the case of Catholic, Roma families subject to loyalist terror. The emergence of Connolly's Irish Citizen's Army was a direct response to a savage attack on Dublin workers by the bosses in 1913.

The mounting attacks on Catholic areas in 1969/71 brought forth mass organised defence. The Citizens Defence Committees were an expression of this need. Unfortunately this struggle was derailed into an elitist guerrilla campaign, of which the INLA formed a small part, substituting itself for mass action and serving to leave the masses passive and increasingly alienated from the struggle. Of course socialists should stand four square behind Republicans in the armed struggle against the imperialists but only a mobilised working class throughout Ireland using strikes, occupations and a workers' militia could have effectively brought that struggle to victory.

The IRSP in their flight from guerrillism now seem to have also ditched any formal attachment to a revolutionary party. In common with republican groups the question of physical force is reduced to an elitist conspiracy not as a means of collective armed defence for the masses. Up till now, drawing on ideas expressed in an earlier written Ta Power document, the IRSP have said the main task is to develop a revolutionary party to lead the struggle for a Workers' Republic where the military element is subordinated to the political. They were keen to show the need for supporting social and economic struggles alongside their involvement in the anti imperialist struggle unlike the narrow nationalists of the Provisionals and the economic dismissal of the national question by some far left groups.

However even this 'Republican Socialism' was still very far removed from a Marxist approach. Seamus Costello and Ta Power were at one in promoting the primacy of the struggle for national liberation in Ireland. They wrote 'the major contradiction in Ireland today' is the continued British occupation of the six counties and the resulting denial of our right to self determination and sovereignty'. Further it entails 'mobilising the mass of the Irish people in the struggle for National Liberation' (Supplement to Starry Plough '87). This failed to see the struggle against capitalism as the strategic question for the Irish working class.

The central contradiction in Ireland today is a class question, the primary struggle on one that pits Irish workers against Irish capitalists. The Irish ruling class is undoubtedly a weak capitalist class compared to the major imperialist ones and is very much dependent on US, Euro capital but this contradiction cannot just be resolved through a national liberation struggle against the British. Only a workers' revolution throughout the island overthrowing native and foreign capitalism can finally resolve the national and class questions. Only working class action north and south including democratically controlled armed mass defence with a strategy of uninterrupted struggle from democratic and national demands through to a Workers Republic could have avoided the inevitable sell outs of republicans.

Of course there still remains an unfinished national struggle against the occupation of the six counties, but groups like the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party have consistently downplayed or ignored it. The perspective and strategy of Trotsky's permanent revolution has always been to locate the working class as the driving force in leading any struggle to resolve the national question, which can only be consistently achieved by overthrowing capitalism itself. Such a strategy should underpin any new programme for a socialist revolution in Ireland.

The depth and scale of the recession in Ireland combined with defeat of the national struggle has generated a crisis of direction amongst socialists and republicans. There will be members and supporters of the IRSM thoroughly shocked by the recent turn outlined in the statement. Equally there will be those members looking forward to life without a military wing. For all involved in the IRSM it is time to think afresh about what kind of revolutionary programme we need.

Workers Power is open and honest about wanting to engage in serious discussion on the way forward. Socialists have a duty to their class to spell out a strategy to abolish a capitalist system that has brought untold misery to billions. One step in that direction is laying the foundations of a working class party that can lead to its abolition. Socialists throughout Ireland should discuss and decide on a revolutionary programme for such a party right now.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/irsm-argues-peaceful-political-struggle-ireland>