



# Trotskyism versus economism on Ireland

Tue, 30/05/1989 - 10:59

The February 1989 issue of *Lutte de Classe / Class Struggle*, published by the International Communist Union (ICU), the international grouping run by the French organisation *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO), carried an article on the armed struggle in Northern Ireland. We print here a reply from our Irish section, the Irish Workers Group.

It was first published in a pamphlet in French, at the LO Fête outside Paris in May of this year where the IWG held an open forum on the question. LO rejected the MRCI's request for a debate on the issue and instead organised a rival meeting at the same time as that of the IWG. LO further reneged on its promise to send representatives to the IWG forum. We have submitted this article to *Lutte de Classe*, which claims to be 'a place where all those who really want to create truly communist and revolutionary organisations can exchange, debate and discuss their viewpoints'.

In the original pamphlet, we reproduced the ICU *Lutte de Classe* article. For reasons of space, we are not able to do so here. We have therefore slightly edited the article, including quotes from LO which will enable the reader to follow the argument better.

## **Reply to *Lutte Ouvrière* on the national question in Ireland**

The article on the struggle in Northern Ireland in *Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle* (February 1989) analysed the problem in an economistic way which arrived at wrong political conclusions. Nowhere did it characterise the conflict as a national struggle against an imperialist power - a fact of central importance to proletarian internationalists.

The article did not characterise the Irish republican movement (Sinn Féin/IRA) as a revolutionary nationalist force. Rather, it concentrated on the peripheral aspect of the republicans' method which consists of their concern for 'getting some sort of recognition' from their enemy, from other governments, from public opinion - regardless of the consequences for the very people they claim to be fighting for.<sup>1</sup>

Further, it failed to state what should be the attitude of revolutionaries internationally to the republicans or to the struggle which they lead. Consequently, the sharp criticism of the republicans, while correct in several aspects, allows the reader to conclude that LO and its co-thinkers refuse to take the side of this movement in its struggle against the British army in Ireland.

## **National oppression and the national struggle**

First of all, the article lacked any historical perspective. As a result the origins of the present phase of the struggle were incorrectly portrayed and at least one serious error of fact was introduced to support a dangerously wrong conclusion about the loyalist (protestant) working class and its place in the revolutionary struggle.

The conflict between the Northern State and its catholic nationalist minority exploded in 1968 around demands for reforms in the electoral system and the allocation of housing. All the major immediate grievances, however, had their roots in the systematic discrimination against the nationalist population on the basis of their Irish nationalist identity.

Between 1921 and 1925 the border between the two states was fixed by Britain with the deliberate aim of giving the loyalist protestant population the maximum possible territory in which they could maintain a permanent majority over the nationalist minority interspersed among them in the north east.

It was as nationalists that the catholic minority suffered systematic discrimination, and it was in terms of the re-unification of Ireland that they saw the only solution to this special oppression. The nationalist movement which established its own bourgeois rule in the semi-colonial South in the 1920s and 1930s, however, left no doubt about its bitter hostility to every force which might struggle to achieve the historic goal of national unity, even though such national unity was the first official aim of the southern state itself!

Radical nationalist forces have existed continuously since 1922 as an armed conspiratorial guerrilla organisation. They have repeatedly engaged in armed campaigns to end Britain's continued occupation and partition of Ireland. It was only in the conditions of the popular revolt of 1968-72, however, that they were able to place themselves at the head of the popular masses who were struggling to complete the unfinished business of the historic Irish national struggle.

The nationalist mass mobilisations of 1968-69 for democratic reforms (equal voting, fair allocation of houses) took on a revolutionary character only because the Northern Ireland state was, and remains, inherently built upon the national oppression of the catholic minority within its borders.

It was the loyalist regime, in refusing the reforms, who first characterised the struggle for 'civil rights' as a nationalist struggle to unite Ireland. It was only when peaceful demonstrations resulted in pogroms by organised loyalist mobs and murderous attacks by the state forces that the mass movement was re-awakened to the revolutionary nationalist dynamic of their struggle.

The failure of the Irish 'Trotskyist' left in 1968-69 to anticipate and recognise the character of the developing struggle as a national struggle was central to their failure to offer an alternative leadership. Their gross underestimation of the objective basis for a resurgent nationalist movement tactically disarmed them. The left organisations were thus crippled despite the significant role that some of their small forces had played in the civil rights movement or behind the barricades.

During a year of mass action when the question of leadership in the nationalist population remained unresolved, the mass of catholics looked instinctively to their traditional defenders, the guerrilla army of the republican movement, despite its virtual absence from the struggle until mid-1970! It is this important fact that underlay the ability of the IRA to hegemonise the popular revolt, in the absence of an alternative revolutionary communist leadership. The left forces had failed to relate, with principled united front tactics, to popular illusions in nationalist solutions.

### **An economistic analysis**

LO's analysis tends to reduce the unfinished Irish question to simple economic considerations. They limit the grievances of the catholics to the problems of workers' access to jobs and housing. This ignores the central role played by the questions of political equality, including equal rights to vote, and of the exclusion of the catholic petit bourgeoisie from political life within the Six County state. The struggle is thus presented as a working class struggle in the north east in the context of working class militancy throughout Ireland.

Tragically, no such link was developed between the struggles of the nationally-divided working class, north and south. Tragically, the perspectives and leadership of the mobilised catholic minority in the north, even at their most radical, remained petit bourgeois and never developed a class-conscious expression. The Northern catholic middle-class split the movement not along class lines but between petit bourgeois revolutionary nationalism and bourgeois constitutional nationalism.

True, as LO's article says, 'the North of Ireland has long ceased to be a major economic asset for the British bourgeoisie'.<sup>2</sup> Its population, however, has formed a permanent reserve army of labour in the UK economy.

Its few large industries operate at lower wage rates to the benefit of British capitalism. It comprises a large land mass with an extensive agricultural industry far out of proportion to the weight of its population within the UK economy (2.5%) of which it forms but one 'subsidised' region. To describe it as a 'parasite living off the £8 billion net subsidies paid every year by the British state'<sup>3</sup> is entirely one-sided.

But imperialist powers are not governed only or mainly by economic considerations in their colonial policies! As a region Northern Ireland has consistently served the most reactionary aspects of British imperialist policy for over a century, and even now the struggle itself is valued by important sections of the imperialist bourgeoisie as a training ground for the army and a factory for the methods of police state repression.

Northern Ireland will retain a strategic importance within NATO as long as Southern Ireland remains 'neutral'. It is not the case therefore, as LO suggests, that economic considerations make the British ruling class want to withdraw but that they hesitate for 'electoral reasons',<sup>4</sup> the conservatism of the British petit bourgeoisie, the influence of Irish protestantism in certain mainland British communities etc. The British ruling class is far from persuaded that its strategic interests would be served by extracting itself from Ireland.

It is even more misleading to claim that the protestant petit bourgeoisie in the North merely require a guarantee of their economic future to wean them away from their loyalist attachment to British rule.

It is absurd to say as LO's article does 'What is involved for [Paisley] and for the social layers he represents is not principle, it is money!'<sup>5</sup> This crude economic reductionism misunderstands the whole nature of the Unionist movement and of the loyalist state which it constructed as a veto on Irish national self-determination.

### **The material basis of loyalist reaction**

Historically, the extreme regional unevenness of economic development in Ireland, in the century after the crushing of the revolutionary Irish bourgeoisie in 1798, gave rise to a powerful and reactionary Unionist bloc of classes. The component elements of this bloc 'aristocratic landlords, industrialists, petit bourgeoisie and industrial workers, were united by their common protestantism, and committed to defend the Union with Britain. The bloc was deeply rooted materially in the extreme dependence of its economic development upon the British economy. Its economic basis was threatened by the nationalist movement which totally hegemonised the southern catholic masses.

Acting in concert with the most decisive imperialist sections of the British bourgeoisie, this reactionary Unionist alliance in the north east of Ireland vetoed the complete unity and independence for which the revolutionary wing of the nationalists struggled from 1916-22.

From a strictly economic point of view Britain had no more interest in holding Northern Ireland than it has now, as its capital would have remained absolutely unchallenged throughout a united and formally independent Ireland.

The Unionist bourgeoisie were given their own semi-autonomous state, and they constructed it upon the basis of systematic privileges at every level for loyalist protestants at the expense of the imprisoned nationalist minority within its boundaries. Systematic inequality and discrimination; systematic repression; systematic denial of basic democratic rights 'such was the lot of the catholic nationalists living under the permanent state of emergency since the state was founded. Repeated pogroms, internment without trial 'these were the realities suffered by catholics in recurrent episodes throughout the history of the state.

The leaders of the state machine publicly declared it 'disloyal' to employ a catholic. They openly boasted of their commitment to 'a protestant state for a protestant people'. Right up till 1969 the official civilian militias, the 'B Specials' were exclusively protestant plebeian forces which alone had the right to bear arms in defence of the state. Defence of their state meant brutal action against defenceless catholic nationalist communities. Yes 'all this within a region of the United Kingdom itself. These are the realities which exploded in 1968-70. These are the realities which sustain nationalism as a real force in Northern Ireland. And it is this and not simply a 'whole range of experiences' in three short years of mass struggle which made them able to stand firm against two decades of repression and to keep the fight going, despite everything, up to the present day.

The protestant petit bourgeoisie of Northern Ireland have a deeply rooted commitment to, yes, the 'principles' of their own sectarian state. That commitment goes well beyond any direct economic calculation. The material privileges which sustain their reactionary movement may be meagre in absolute terms, but they are real in relative terms. They extend

even into the system of regional planning which gave the new town of Craigavon and the New University of Ulster to their communities in the late 1960s rather than to the catholic areas which were economically more profitable locations! Loyalists defend the Northern Ireland state as their own state, as the guarantor of their relative privileges and the basis for their quasi-racist sense of superiority over Irish nationalists.

Many reforms have been conceded in response to the struggle, notably on voting rights, but there have been few reforms of material importance apart from a more equal distribution of houses. In a longer perspective the rapid economic decline of industry in the region will undermine the will of the plebeian loyalists and the ability of the bourgeois unionists to resist the combined pressures of the British, of the European Community and of the USA.

These pressures, however, are aimed only at re-shaping the Northern State, not at destroying it. Their goal is to force the loyalist state to accommodate the constitutional catholic nationalists within the political structures of the Northern State ? to share power with the catholic bourgeoisie, and thus to marginalise the armed struggle in the catholic communities. The objective is not a British withdrawal but the propping up of bourgeois order in Ireland.

### **The working class of the Six Counties**

LO's picture of the working class in the Six Counties is the most threadbare and distorted part of its whole analysis. To say there is little difference ?between the working class ghettos in Dublin, the catholic Andersonstown and the protestant Shankill Road in Belfast, the Toxteth area of Liverpool and the Broadwater Farm estate in London?6 is to ignore all the most important political realities that make the class struggle so utterly different in Northern Ireland.

The working class in the North is divided and subordinated to petit bourgeois nationalism on the one hand, to reactionary loyalism on the other. The catholic working class ghettos suffer not only exploitation but a marked degree of special oppression in their material life as nationalists.

As for the protestant working class, the LO article is entirely mistaken when it derides the idea of ?the privileges of the protestant workers? as ?a sinister joke, particularly for the 20% of them on the dole?.7 Such simple economism would make fine rhetoric in the fight to unite protestant and catholic workers in joint economic struggles. But it makes for a very false analysis of the nature of the conflict which actually stands in the way of such united class struggle.

To start with, the figures are wrong. The average unemployment across the two communities is 20%. But the rate of unemployment for catholic workers is 2.5 times as high as for protestant! The consequences of such inequality is not lessened by the general lowering of working class conditions in the declining economy of Ulster.

The ?privileges? of the protestant worker can be stated more positively. In the largest employer ? Short Brothers, manufacturers of aeroplanes and guided missiles ? 90% of the 7,000 workforce is protestant! This is despite 17 years of direct rule from the London parliament which finances Shorts! Having explicitly dismissed the relevance of the protestant workers? privileges, the writer of LO's article is nevertheless forced to refer to ?the relatively privileged and mostly protestant section of the working class?!8

Such ?privileges?, however, must be understood as marginal in absolute terms. The average conditions of the protestant working class are no better than for the British working class in general. The fact that they do not equate with the unequal privileges of the middle class over the working class does not, however, make their marginal privileges unimportant!

The unskilled and unemployed among the protestant workers suffer low standards of living similar to their catholic neighbours, but individual protestant workers have a greater chance of moving out of the lower strata than their catholic neighbours by being a part of the network of favoritism and patronage in the protestant community.

What is ultimately decisive in shaping the outlook of even the lowest strata is that they are dominated in their workplaces, trade unions, communities and Orange Lodges by the those who do enjoy real relative privileges in comparison to their catholic neighbours. The collective ideology of protestant loyalism involves even the most

exploited protestant workers in an identification with the sectarian state.

The marginal privileges of the skilled protestant worker, and his dominance over the mass of protestant workers, have played a powerful historical role in the nineteenth century in creating the reactionary Unionist class alliance. They later played a crucial role in consolidating the loyalist Northern State. The powers of the state itself have been deliberately used to entrench the privileged position of protestants at every social level.

Of course, much has changed with the rapid decline of the Ulster economy. Increasingly the confidence of the protestant working class, as well as its bourgeois masters, in 'their own' fortress-state is being undermined. But these developments have hardly begun to erode the reactionary consciousness of the protestant working class in general on questions of democratic rights in Ireland.

Important united economic struggles of protestant and catholic workers emerged spontaneously in 1907, 1919 and in the 1930s but it was their antagonisms on the national question that was always the decisive instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie in breaking their resistance.

It would be idealist and utopian to pretend that the sectarian divisions were based merely in a false consciousness, were merely a lying conspiracy of the bourgeoisie to trap and divide the workers. A century of sectarian conflict has proven otherwise. The reactionary outlook of the protestant working class has a material basis historically which continues to exist.

To challenge it effectively means to take forward the revolutionary democratic struggle against the Northern State as one vital part of the revolutionary proletarian programme. It means never hiding from the protestant workers our opposition to British imperialism and its loyalist allies even while we struggle to involve them in united class action against the capitalist offensive.

The national struggle of the catholic working class, at the same time, contains a powerful progressive element despite the illusory nature of nationalist solutions. This is especially true in Ireland where a united bourgeois state is all but impossible and would in any case solve none of the material problems of the oppressed and exploited.

This is far removed from the perspectives which LO draws from its analysis. As in the Irish perspectives of the economistic Militant Tendency, LO emphasises workers' unity of protestant and catholic as the concrete means to open up the road of class struggle, 'by closing the ranks of both protestant and catholic working classes against the bosses'.<sup>9</sup>

For both Militant and Lutte Ouvrière, such a policy involves downplaying or denying that there exists a national struggle with a progressive dynamic against imperialism. For both organisations a simplistic economism serves to downplay or deny the depth and the material basis of the divisions between oppressed nationalist workers and loyalist workers whose political outlook is deeply reactionary.

LO's article conjures up a fantastic schema. It suggests that a British withdrawal would create the conditions for a 'working class armed uprising' because of its economic impact upon the Northern Ireland economy:

'The real and main problem for the British state is in fact the working class, both protestant and catholic. The drastic increase of unemployment and the sharp reduction in the standard of living of the working class which would come out of a settlement may spark off a violent reaction among workers . . . This danger is a very real one for the British state. There are plenty of weapons around in working class districts in Northern Ireland, and no shortage of people who have used them one day or another and would be prepared to use them again. The last thing the British state wants to risk is a working class armed uprising so close to its own land!'<sup>10</sup>

It is simply stupid to suggest that the arms used today in defence of reaction by sections of the loyalist working class might tomorrow be turned against the bourgeoisie, in a united offensive with catholic workers, because of a rapid economic decline in the wake of a British withdrawal.

Such a schema simply wishes away the complex problems of revolutionary perspectives for the nationally divided Irish working class.

There is no evidence whatever that such a withdrawal is contemplated by Britain. Its economic offensive in Northern Ireland is certainly no sharper than in the 'mainland'. If London and the other imperialists agreed with Dublin and sections of the Northern bourgeoisie to re-unite Ireland from above, it could only be done on the basis of economic guarantees to both sections of the Irish bourgeoisie, possibly within the framework of a European Community plan.

What LO does not suggest is that such a withdrawal from the North might be forced upon the British by a mass revolutionary movement in Ireland, increasingly led by class-conscious proletarian forces but accelerated in particular by popular resistance to imperialist repression and super-exploitation. That would pose a profound threat to bourgeois order as a whole in Ireland.

Of course, a revolutionary process developing along such lines would have to win significant sections of protestant workers or at least shatter the loyalist class alliance and neutralise proletarian loyalism as a force. LO gives no consideration to this, the key problem of revolutionary strategy and tactics in Ireland. Solving these programmatic problems is a fundamental task of the construction of the Irish section of a revolutionary communist international. The existence of such a section, and its leadership of the struggle, will be indispensable for the final victory of the Irish masses.

### **Criticising the republicans**

LO's article is devoted principally to an attack on the Irish republican movement. Such criticism is, we believe, a duty for Trotskyists. The Irish Workers Group has never held back from that duty, including within the republicans' own meetings and campaigns. We make our criticisms, however, from the standpoint of complete solidarity with the struggle to force Britain out of Ireland, and alongside the unequivocal and public defence of the IRA against the imperialists.

It is for revolutionary communists fighting within Ireland, however, to impose conditions on their support for the IRA, as part of the fight to replace them with a revolutionary communist leadership.

Our fraternal organisations in other countries, especially Workers' Power in Britain, must subordinate their criticisms of the IRA to the primary duty of winning the unconditional support of British workers for the IRA against their own state. What is the framework in which LO criticises the IRA? It appears to make no clear internationalist declaration of support for the struggle against imperialism in Ireland.

As for the content of LO's criticisms of the republicans, many of them are correct. As they rightly point out:

'What does Sinn Féin have to offer the Irish workers, North and South? A united and independent Ireland. United with the reactionary catholic church which is still tightly in control of the Republic's state? Independent but with even less resources than it has now, therefore with lower standards of living? Independent with the perspective of having to slave away in order to compensate for the lack of an industrial basis? What sort of socialism can be built on such a basis? except a caricature of socialism based on more exploitation and more poverty for the working class?'

The 'socialist' rhetoric of the republicans is a sham. Their methods render their own mass of supporters utterly passive. They cynically cultivate bourgeois parliamentary respectability in order to negotiate for a re-organised bourgeois Ireland. They do not give a lead to any section of the working class in resisting economic attacks. By the same token they turn their backs on the class needs of the protestant workers also.

But we do not agree with LO that the republicans embody 'absolute and total contempt for the protestant population including for its most deprived layers'.<sup>12</sup> That is the language of pro-imperialist propaganda in Ireland and internationally, echoed by 'Trotskyist' tendencies such as Militant, the Spartacists . . . and LO! It is quite a different thing to say that they do nothing 'to bridge the gap between protestant and catholic workers'.<sup>13</sup>

It is true that some of the IRA's military actions result in the inexcusable killings of civilians and a deeper antagonism between the nationalist and loyalist communities. Increasingly their own political leaders openly criticise such actions.

It would be completely wrong, however, to suggest that their guerrilla campaign is characterised in essence by a hostility to the protestant population as such, even if some particular actions by some guerrillas are almost certainly conceived with a deliberate sectarian hatred for protestants. It must be remembered that very large numbers of protestants (and almost no catholics) actively participate in the huge police force of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, in the police reserves and in the local battalions of the British army – the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The catholic community has daily experience of brutal repression at the hands of these forces, as well as of the British army. In the eyes of the most combative sections of the catholics, this experience makes such forces legitimate targets, even when they are not 'on duty'. It would be utterly wrong to suggest any similarity between the actions or outlook of the republicans and the actions and outlook of the loyalist murder gangs who randomly kill catholics in order to terrorise and intimidate their communities.

The problem is not Sinn Féin's 'total contempt for the protestant population'. It is rather its petit bourgeois class outlook which completely subordinates any consideration of the common needs of all sections of the working class. It is a petit bourgeois party and leadership, despite the fact that its biggest mass support is among the most exploited working class sections of the catholic population in the North. Small farmers in the North also form an influential part of its base, but they are not an important social force.

As a political current, Sinn Féin exists on an all-Ireland basis and draws support from a widely scattered, although thin, layer of the petit bourgeoisie throughout the country as a whole. It has no significant support among the southern masses and no organic relationship to the working class as such.

Ghettoised in the North, without support in the South, and with a programme that can only isolate it from the concerns of southern workers, the republicans are incapable of developing the national struggle to the point of forcing a British withdrawal. They have little possibility, therefore, of ever becoming the direct agent of the imperialist bourgeoisie in re-constructing bourgeois rule in a united Ireland, as suggested by LO in its article when they argue that:

'As long as Sinn Fein's influence remains what it is today, it is obvious that no settlement can be pushed through without its involvement.'<sup>14</sup>

The pre-condition for developing the revolutionary-democratic struggle against repression, British imperialism and Partition, is the involvement of significant working-class forces from the South. That cannot be done except with a revolutionary communist action programme and party which combines tactics towards the national struggle with action goals which lead to the strategy of workers' power throughout the island – a strategy of permanent revolution.

As a revolutionary-nationalist formation the republicans stand at the head of an open mass revolt against British rule in Northern Ireland and against that sectarian statelet itself. Communists are obliged, therefore, to fight for united front tactics with them and the forces they lead.

The Irish Workers Group carries out this policy by fighting for unity in action between 'workers, socialists and republicans' around concrete issues of repression, for the prisoners' demands, for troops out etc. We have consistently fought alongside republican activists on this basis while always openly arguing our independent revolutionary communist programme.

There is no other principled way to relate to the 'radical militant Northern catholic areas' which LO correctly sees as an important location for proletarian revolutionaries to build support. Having rooted a communist party in such sections, however, does not mean, as LO believes, that there is any direct route from there to the task of 'closing the ranks of both protestant and catholic working classes against the bosses . . . and against the most unacceptable and blatant aspects of the British occupation'.<sup>15</sup>

Why only oppose ?aspects? of the British occupation? Does this mean that LO does not recognise the legitimacy of the demand of the Irish national struggle to drive out the British army entirely? Their central emphasis on unity of protestant and catholic workers in economic struggles leads LO, as for the Militant and the Spartacists, to put forward utopian perspectives. Open and unconditional support ? the duty of communists towards national struggles against imperialism ? runs a poor second place.

The national struggle is of central importance for communists in Ireland as a whole. It has been a source of instability to bourgeois rule throughout the island in every decade since partition. Many important features of the Irish social and political formation, especially the political backwardness of the Irish working class as a whole, are directly rooted in the division of the nation and the class by British-imperialist partition and in the economic subordination of southern Ireland to the imperialist powers.

Irish economic and social development as a whole is distorted and retarded by its profound dependence on imperialist capitalism ? British, US and other European. This may yet be of enormous importance in speeding up the tendency towards economic and political crisis and mass unrest in the period ahead. The only possible ? but extremely unlikely ? alternative is that the increased economic integration of the European Community succeeds in propping up the Irish economy. Thus there is not only an open struggle against imperialism in the North but also a latent dynamic of popular revolt against the depredations of capitalist imperialism in the South ? albeit that conditions for the latter depend at present upon international economic developments.

It is this combination of features in Irish society, North and South, that makes it possible to put forward a perspective of permanent revolution for the class struggle in Ireland. The programme of revolutionary communists must not only advance a transitional action programme for the independent needs of the proletariat. It must simultaneously fight for working class leadership in all popular revolts which arise out of the two distinct features of Ireland?s subordination to imperialism.

Our first duty is to apply that method now, in Ireland and internationally. We stand clearly with the struggle of the oppressed nationalist minority in Northern Ireland and we defend the republican fighters who, whatever their methods, are the current leadership of the struggle against British imperialism.

In the imperialist heartlands communists must fight for British troops out of Ireland now and self-determination for the Irish people as a whole!

### **By way of conclusion**

Faithful to its economistic method and its vulgar materialism, LO turns its back on the sole strategy capable of transforming the national struggle in Ireland into a struggle for workers? power: the strategy of permanent revolution. Nowhere does LO put forward an action programme capable of simultaneously resolving the social question and the national question in Ireland. Despite its claims to be Trotskyist, LO ignores the role of imperialism in Ireland and fails in the elementary duty of every communist to openly support all those who struggle against British imperialism and its more than 10,000 troops, its police and its gangs of loyalist paramilitary killers.

This internationalist duty, especially important for militants in an imperialist country such as France, is absolutely indispensable if one wishes to criticise the republicans from a class point of view. Failure to use this approach leads you to line up with the imperialist bourgeoisie which is always ready to attack the ?terrorism? of the oppressed.

None of this should surprise regular readers of Lutte de Classe. In a series of other articles on anti-imperialist struggles, Lutte Ouvrière and the ICU have shown their total incomprehension when faced with the democratic and anti-imperialist demands of the oppressed masses. In the case of Israel, the ICU propose limply that it is necessary to ?foster an awareness, based on the Palestinians? struggle; that there are general interests involved, that the Palestinian?s fight could become the fight of all workers?.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst this is an admirable sentiment, as usual LO and the ICU give no indication of how it is to be achieved. We are

left with the pious hope that revolutionaries should 'prove to the Jewish working class and to the Jewish population as a whole that it is in their interest to break with the Zionist policy of Israel'.<sup>17</sup>

As in Northern Ireland, LO/ICU prefer to 'forget' the role of imperialism and its ability to divide the working class, hoping that merely concentrating on economic questions will lead to the working class spontaneously developing a revolutionary awareness of capitalist, imperialist and national oppression!

In this economic dream-world, the realities of national oppression can be dismissed with a wave of a hand, and revolutionaries can get on with the real business of the economic class struggle, which seems to be all that counts for this organisation.

It is this position which in France has led Lutte Ouvrière to:

'ignore the question of building real solidarity with the Kanak people struggling against French imperialism

'gaily identify the nationalism of the oppressed with the nationalism of the oppressor ('racism, nationalism, they're the same thing, they're both stupid' said LO's election stickers in 1986 . . .)

'minimise the importance of the rising tide of racism and the growth of the fascist Front National, and to refuse to create a worker's campaign against racism and fascism.

And with this record LO dares to give lessons to the oppressed peoples on how to conduct an anti-imperialist struggle!

No doubt LO and the ICU feel that their position protects them from the influence of petit bourgeois nationalism. In fact, it cuts them off from the oppressed sectors of the proletariat, and brings their politics dangerously close to that of the chauvinist reformists.

In Ireland, as in the Middle East, Kanaky and France, the oppressed masses have no need of LO's rationalist and abstract principles. They need a revolutionary programme which will lead them to victory. That is the goal of the Irish Workers Group and the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International.

## Notes

1. Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle, February 1989 p48
2. Ibid, p38
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid, p40
6. Ibid, p57
7. Ibid, pp54-55
8. Ibid, p39
9. Ibid, p57
10. Ibid, pp40-41
11. Ibid, p56
12. Ibid, p54
13. Ibid, p55
14. Ibid, p42
15. Ibid, p57
16. Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle , No8 p6
17. Ibid