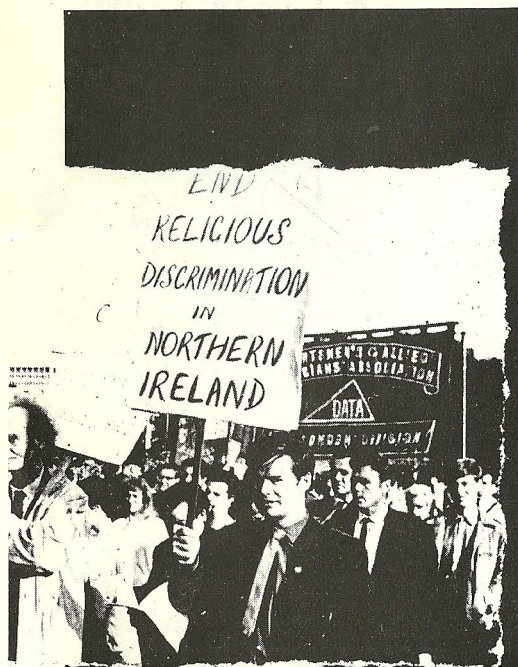


A COMMUNIST PARTY
DISCUSSION PAMPHLET



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In the year of the 20th. anniversary of the foundation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, the Communist Party of Ireland is publishing a series of discussion papers on the contemporary relevance of the struggle for democracy in Ireland. This is one such contribution. We welcome contributions to this debate which will be carried in the pages of our journals.

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DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. That event saw the coming together of a broad range of forces, trade union, democratic and cultural, amongst which the Communist Party was prominent. NICRA's straightforward demands for an end to discrimination and basic political rights for all exposed the sectarian and violent nature of the Unionist regime which ruled Northern Ireland.

That regime responded with brutal violence when the Civil Rights Movement tried to march peacefully, though necessarily illegally, to bring its message to the people of Derry on October 5th 1968. The Unionists, with Ian Paisley in the lead, incited sectarianism on a wide scale. The eventual result was the pogroms of 1969 which were largely led by the B Specials and RUC.

There is no doubt that the awful violence of the years since has its root cause in the tyranny, discrimination and state terror of the Unionist regimes which ruled the North of Ireland for half a century. Neither the Unionists nor the British government have ever learned the lesson that denial of democracy creates violence. That is not an excuse for those today carrying on a pointless and counterproductive armed campaign, simply a statement of historical fact.

The Civil Rights Movement gradually lost its mass character as a result of a number of factors. First was the terrible pressure of Unionist and British repression. Second was political opportunism by those who then, as now, wanted only the crumbs from the tables of power. Third, was the elitism of physical force nationalists who had the arrogance to claim to fight on behalf of the people. But its struggle is far from having been in vain.

The Unionist political monolith has fractured and they have lost, probably for ever, control over the apparatus of government here. No-one should underestimate the importance of that fact nor the extent to which Unionism is today breaking apart. Every person now has the right to vote and to organise politically. The recent "discussion document" issued by the British government, which seeks to make every candidate for public office sign a declaration against violence, is an amazingly stupid, as well as retrogressive step. It will be easily got round - but another repressive law will be on the books and another anti-democratic precedent set.

Sectarian discrimination still exists, not just as an inherited pattern but also as a live and active force. But big strides have been made in confronting

it. The forces opposing it are building all the time. The recent campaign around the McBride Principles, in spite of the way some opportunists have jumped on the bandwagon, has been important in that respect. The Communist Party has argued since they were drafted that the Principles are a useful framework within which to address problems of discrimination. Equally important has been the struggle of the trade union movement, going back at least to 1967, for effective anti-discrimination legislation. Their proposals, in some respects, go beyond the McBride principles. Yet the British Government, by their opposition to the McBride campaign, has cast real doubt on its declared commitment to fair employment.



In no sense, however, has democracy come to the North of Ireland. On the contrary, the people of the North, and indeed of the whole of Ireland are subordinated more than ever to the domination of outside power.

In its programme of 1962 the Communist Party of Ireland declared that democracy was the great issue on which British rule could be challenged. In 1987 democracy is now, as much as ever, the great national issue facing the people of Ireland.

In the North, the apparatus of a repressive state is still fully in place. Northern Ireland has the most undemocratic laws in Europe with a conviction machine instead of a system of justice. Instead of a police service it has the armed militias of the RUC and UDR, backed up and controlled by the army and secret services of Britain. Northern Ireland is therefore a statelet where basic civil liberties are denied. Furthermore, we are ruled by a British military/bureaucratic elite over which democratic political forces have no influence.

This ruling power has fully imposed on us the vicious social and economic policies of Thatcherism. While violence and repression have continued unabated, the most horrendous damage has been done to our manufacturing industry and our

public services. Unemployment, always higher than the worst region of Britain, is a scourge which not only means massive poverty but keeps the whole working population in fear of losing their livelihoods.

The authoritarian Tory regime, now in its third parliamentary term, has tried to extend its domination more firmly and securely over the whole of Ireland. With the Anglo-Irish Agreement it has succeeded in bringing bourgeois nationalism, North and South into a new system of pro-imperialist alliances. The Unionists are now showing every sign of being prepared to enter this structure as junior partners. This new Treaty commits the legally sovereign Irish state to support for partition and to an acceptance of British control over its entire national policy. Irish security forces now accept British orders under the guise of "co-operation."

One of the purposes of the Hillsborough Treaty is to draw the Republic closer into the ambit of NATO. Britain under Thatcher is one of the most aggressive members of that aggressive military alliance, giving slavish obedience to Reagan in all his more warlike adventures. The Single European Act also has as one of its aims the military integration of the EEC countries. The "Galuzzi" Report, presented to the



European Parliament in October, goes even further. It demands the complete identification of the EEC with the Western European Union - the European arm of NATO.

The Single European Act also aims for the complete subjugation of the member states, especially the less

developed and more peripheral ones, to the interests of the huge multi-national banking and industrial conglomerates.

Free movement of capital and labour, the abolition of customs and excise duties and the integration of the monetary system all mean that Ireland North and South will be more subordinated to the centres of finance capital. The reduction of the power of veto within EEC institutions means a further erosion of national sovereignty. In the next few years the development of the EEC, already economically disastrous for Ireland, will mean a much worse future. Ireland, North and South, will be little more than a food producer dominated by agri-business combined with a folksy tourist attraction for the new rich servants of the multinationals.

We in Ireland are now living in a qualitatively new phase where the ability of the people of such a peripheral and under-developed region to control their own destiny through existing political structures has been all but destroyed. In these circumstances democracy certainly is the great national issue. The fight for basic democratic rights, both political and economic, becomes merged with the issue of national unity, independence and sovereignty itself.

For the reality is that all the important decisions about what happens to the people who live on this island are now taken outside it. Our rulers put out highly effective propaganda that there is no alternative, that it is impossible to change our position of powerlessness. And it is true that to change it will be no simple matter. All our protests in the North seem to make little difference. All our changes of government in the South, equally make little difference.

If we want to end our position of powerlessness; if we want to exercise genuine democratic rights, then we will have to exercise independence and sovereignty. Independence means freedom from outside domination, the ability to make decisions without interference. Sovereignty means the power to carry out decisions, the ability actually to influence reality. Without independence and sovereignty no-one who lives on this island can exercise full democratic rights.

What are these basic democratic rights we are speaking of?

First, is the question of ending repression and discrimination. Second, is the issue of economic self-determination - the power to take our own decisions in confronting unemployment and emigration. Third, is the question of political

participation - popular influence on the exercise of political power. Fourth, is the demand for an end to sectarianism and violence. Fifth, are what we can term social rights, which include genuine equality for women, an end to discrimination on the grounds of sexual preference, ready access to civil divorce, contraception and abortion, rights of children and young people.

These are the great democratic issues that face us today. It is our argument that the obstacles to the achievement of these democratic rights have now been brought together in an all-Ireland system of domination which is itself a constituent part of the network that links the imperialist centres of Western Europe and North America and to which Ireland is subordinated. That implies that we should fight for these rights on a national basis, uniting democratic forces North and South. But it is our further contention that the achievement of each of these basic democratic rights is linked to the progress of a struggle for a new, independent and sovereign Irish state which includes all of this island.

The sophisticated and interlocking system of repressive laws and practices which has been developed as Britain's main weapon in ruling the North has now extended to an

all-Ireland system. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, under the cover of an opportunity to soften the system in the North, actually secures the complicity of the Southern state in operating the great bulk of that system. Our demands to dismantle the apparatus of repression must therefore also be made on the Southern state as well as on Britain.

The further implication is that the dissolution of the main way in which Britain dominates Ireland must involve a progressive disengagement by Britain from that domination itself. So that an anti-repression position leads naturally to the demand for a British declaration of intent to withdraw from Ireland.

Economic self-determination is an absolutely fundamental right which is presently denied to all our people. To exercise it would mean withdrawal from the EEC and the development of an economy not subordinated to the demands of the great multinationals. That could only happen by the vigorous and militant assertion of national sovereignty. Yet for the North that is impossible because of its position as part of the UK and its lack of economic viability as a unit. For the South, partition cuts it off from much of the economic potential of the country and if it tried to "go it alone" its efforts would be undermined and

subverted through the leaky sieve of the border. For both parts of Ireland, therefore, the full exercise of economic self-determination requires the foundation of a new, united, Irish state.

It is, of course, a basic principle of democracy that the people should have the ability to influence the process of political decision-making. We are aware that bourgeois parliamentary democracy is in fact a cover for the rule of the capitalist class, but parliament does, at least, provide an arena for political struggle. That arena is completely denied for the people of Northern Ireland. Participation in Westminster can be no substitute for direct influence on decisions affecting the North itself. Even for the South, the Dail has surrendered so much of its power to the institutions of the EEC that it requires a fundamental change so that even the minimum of effect on the life of the country can be had by political participation. Again, the overwhelming implication is that a new Irish state must be created.

Especially for those in the North, Unionist or Nationalist, who feel so sharply their powerlessness - it is not worth fighting for anything less than sovereignty. And sovereignty could never be achieved within the bounds of the Northern

Ireland statelet, it can only be achieved within an all-Ireland political structure.

With the daily catalogue of murders which are in effect sectarian, whichever "side" perpetrates them, there is no demand more pressing than for an end to sectarianism and violence. To achieve that goal demands progress towards the unity of the working people and especially the working class. That coming together can only happen in the process of struggle. But that struggle must be on a democratic basis. There must be no suggestion that one section of the working people is out to dominate the other.

That does not just mean to fight against the repression which encourages so much sectarian violence. It also means that there must be clarity on the necessity to eradicate sectarian discrimination in the North. By the same token, however, there must be an equally militant struggle against the denial of social and civil liberties in the South.

Many Unionist-minded people fear being the subjects of discrimination in an all-Ireland state, and fear the loss of existing social rights, it is impossible to require them to join with their nationalist-minded brothers and sisters in the struggle for democracy, unless they can be assured that

the fight is for a completely new, democratic Ireland. The achievement of a democratic consensus between the divided sections of the working people requires an understanding on the one side of the necessity to abolish sectarian discrimination and on the other of the necessity to transcend the confessional and socially repressive sovereign state which currently exists by the establishment of a new state.

It is only this democratic accommodation that can finally defeat the sectarian violence. It could isolate the Unionist terror gangs and deprive them of any popular support and it could provide a realistic alternative to the so-called "armed struggle" of the Provisionals.

Finally, the denial of social rights is an issue for the people North and South, though particularly sharp in the South. For the reasons just given, it is vital for political progress in the North that major advances take place on this issue in the South.

We argue that the struggle for democracy has its natural consequence and focus in the attempt to establish a new, independent and sovereign all-Ireland state. But that does not mean that we have adopted the crass ultra-leftist formulation that "the Northern Ireland state is irreformable" and therefore

must be "destroyed" before political progress can be made. That position assumes some power outside of mass action by the working people which will defeat imperialism and create a united Ireland. It is a political justification for any action which can be said to be "anti-British." It is the kind of circular argument that groups like the Red Brigades or the Baader-Meinhof gang have used. "The Northern state must be smashed - we want to smash it - so we can do what we like, kill who we like."



The Communist position is absolutely the contrary. An independent sovereign Irish state cannot be founded except on the basis of the democratic struggle we have outlined. No activity which has effects that hold back that struggle, such as the military campaign of the Provisionals, can actually contribute to the defeat of imperialism and the establishment of such a state.

It ought also to be made clear, that the Communist Party does not believe that a mass democratic movement can be built on the basis of "litmus test" politics. It is certainly our view that national unity and independence are the logical consequence of democratic struggle. But it is not a condition of participation in all the many varied aspects of that struggle to also declare that belief. It is in the progress of struggle that masses of people will come to that position. To demand it as a condition of entry will simply mean that either the struggle will not exist at all, or that it will be confined to the nationalist section of the people.

In summation, in this, the year of the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights

Association, and the nineteenth anniversary of the brutal attack on the marching Movement in Derry, we should be looking for the development of an all-Ireland movement for democratic rights. The policies laid down at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of Ireland, for the disengagement of Britain on a progressive basis and the transition to a popular government elected from all parts of this island, provides a practical and realistic goal for such a movement. But all those, of whatever current political beliefs, who are concerned for democracy can fight for it. All those who wish to establish civil rights can join together in a common movement which will lay the basis for the transition to socialism which alone can complete and sum up the achievement of full democracy for the working people of Ireland.

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