

OUR ORIENTATION TO THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT

Introduction:

The general line of this document is moved as an addition (addendum) to the resolution on Tasks & Perspectives adopted by the National Committee.

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A) Sinn Féin's Turn to the Left:

Anti-imperialist politics today are dominated by Sinn Féin's turn to the left. Since November 1979, when the National H-Block/Armagh Campaign (NHBAC) was founded, a new relationship of forces has been established within the anti-imperialist vanguard. Under the impact of the NHBAC's gains, SF has consciously made important advances. Compared with the 1970s, Sinn Féin now stands for:

- * A broader acceptance of the need for united action on specific issues, even where this means co-operation with forces hostile to the national liberation struggle.
- * Greater involvement in the trade unions, more attention to social and economic issues, planned leadership of particular struggles (e.g. the Dublin communities fight against the drug pushers, active support for the travellers)

more approach to
* A/constructive / electoral campaigns.

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* Greater programmatic clarity on the women's liberation movement.

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Sinn Féin has grown significantly. It is more attractive to left wing militants. This includes PD's ranks and periphery. We must project a new strategic orientation.

A) Sinn Féin's Turn to the Left:

B) The H-Block/Armagh Struggle:

The basis of the republican movement is the national struggle. PD will be effective by advocating it becomes broader. Concentration on "left/right" divisions "leading to a split" has been established is therefore a dangerous and futile diversion. The evolution of the "right" Provos and "left" Officials after the 1970 split is proof of this. In a very undeveloped way the republican movement shows the necessary class alliance for victory of the Irish socialist revolution -- an alliance between the working class and small farmers. The difficulty now is that the alliance is too small, that the working class does not have sufficient programmatic leadership, and that the republican movement cannot alone build this necessary alliance.

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The best way to broaden the base of the anti-imperialist movement is a systematic and conscious development of the NHRAC's gains.

At the start the NHRAC was built as a 'single issue' campaign. Later it moved on to higher level. It contested elections against reformists of all shades -- from the SDLP and Fianna Fail right down to the Workers' Party (WP) and Jim Healy's Democratic Socialist Party (DSP).

C) Ballot-Box and Armalite

(i) Sinn Féin took the electoral lesson to heart, has made itself politically stronger and has won leading NHRAC activists into the party. But a freeze has started to set in. The electoral advance against the SDLP in the 6 counties halted in the June 1984 poll. In the South there is still room for expansion, but there is little chance of ending the dead-end principle of abstentionism.

This is a serious problem. Disenchantment with the establishments in the South is growing. One effect of this is extreme electoral swings and the breakdown of older established patterns. Sinn Féin is one of the beneficiaries. But so also are the WP; even Fianna Fail picks up on the disenchantment, especially when out of office.

There is a basis for ultra-leftist anti-parliamentarism. Sinn Féin's long-standing commitment to abstentionism makes them vulnerable. The slow down in Sinn Féin's electoral advance is fertile ground for a firming up on the "abstentionist principle".

It is also a recipe for deepening the divisions between the vanguard and the masses. Worse, it leaves those who see the futility of abstentionism with nightmare choice of support for outfits like Labour/WP/DSP (in the worst cases) or radical independent leftists like Tony Gregory (in the best cases).

(ii) Gerry Adams' decision to boycott Westminster is wrong. Bernadette MacAliskey and Frank MacManus made much more effective use of their parliamentary seats by attending, and publicly harrassing the British government at every opportunity. PD needs to concentrate much more of its propaganda on this issue.

(iii) Sinn Féin, at present, is weighed down by its past on this issue. If we confine our analysis to speculation on how quickly the party is likely to change, debates on abstentionism and militarism can be put on the long finger. But the objective crisis of the partitioned statelets demands a quicker answer.

Repression is increasing qualitatively. Before the June 1983 poll many events made the SDLP vulnerable to Sinn Féin:

- * Dominic McGlinchey was extradited from South to North (After the June 1983 poll Seamus Shannon was handed over to the RUC also)
- * Judge Gibson made a very provocative acquittal of the "shoot to kill" RUC murderers of Roddy Carroll and Seamus Grew.

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- * The New Ireland Forum -- the SDLP's much touted 'lifeline' -- was a shambles.

The limitations of "ballot-box in one hand, an armalite in the other" have been cruelly exposed. Following the NHBAC's winding -up, the mass movement was demobilized. In the months leading up to the EEC poll the IRA organized attacks on the imperialist forces every week. More recently we have seen the very unwelcome return of car-bombing in nationalist areas (in Newry's main shopping district) and the attempt to blow up the British Tory Cabinet at Brighton.

This runs against the need for mass mobilization. Following the plastic bullet murder of John Downes in August Sinn Féin participated in new mass mobilizations, but in a half-hearted and inconsistent manner. Sinn Féin have even converted the Armagh strip-search campaign into a front for themselves. We are seeing the end of a temporary and unstable compromise between militarism and the NHBAC's gains. Various signs, including Gerry Adams' cautious criticisms of certain IRA actions, show that sections of the republican movement's leadership realize new initiatives are necessary.

D) National Liberation Front/Anti-Imperialist United Front

(i) An overall alternative is needed. The fight for an Anti-Imperialist Workers' Party (AIWP) can be relevant. Put the anti-imperialist movement must take definite steps along the way. An AIWP is only a relevant project if we commit ourselves to building a National Liberation Front/Anti-Imperialist United Front (NLF/AIUF)*

(ii) In our view the NLF/AIUF should be an alliance of the all anti-imperialists and socialists challenging the reformists for leadership of the masses. The NLF/AIUF must be based on a development of the democracy practiced by the NHBAC. It is relevant for elections, and also for building currents in the mass organizations (above all the trade unions). It is a framework where the anti-imperialist left can "agree to disagree" on issues dividing it, for example:

- * Militarism
- * Abstentionism
- * A Woman's Right to Choose Abortion

and a commitment to action on issues it agrees on. Each party or current would retain the right to advance its own programme as a component of the front. This "intermediary form and mediation" will be decisive in constructing the Irish section of the Fourth International.

As it says in the USFI resolution Building the International: experience of the Central American revolution and to an even greater extent the future experiences of the revolutionary crises in other Latin American countries, disparages the theory of the single party. Pluralism, including among revolutionary forces will become increasingly accepted. It stimulates currents and organizations which agree with such pluralism to look for new forms of co-ordination and collaboration which can take the form of conferences of or fronts without necessarily coming to a common organizational framework. We must be ready not only to take our place in such initiatives but to launch them ourselves.

(IIDB, Volume 20, No.4, July 1984, p.13)

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(iii) The programme of the Irish NLF/AIUF should be based on the following points:

- * IMMEDIATE BRITISH MILITARY AND POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL
- * REJECTION OF ALL BRITISH CLAIMS TO SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE ENTIRE ISLAND OF IRELAND AND ITS TERRITORIAL WATERS
- * IMMEDIATE DISARMING AND DISBANDING OF REPRESSIVE FORCES STAFFED BY IMPERIALISM'S PUPPETS: THE RUC, UDR, GARDAI, SPECIAL BRANCH AND SO ON
- * AN AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS
- * REPEAL OF ALL "SPECIAL" LEGISLATION DIRECTED AGAINST THE anti-IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT: PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT, EMERGENCY PROVISIONS ACT, OFFENCES AGAINST THE STATE ACT, SECTION 31 OF THE FREE STATE BROADCASTING ACT AND SO ON.
- * ABOLITION OF "SPECIAL COURTS": DIPLOCK COURTS THE SPECIAL CRIMINAL COURT
- * INDEPENDENCE FROM ALL MILITARY ALLIANCES OF IMPERIALISM, ESPECIALLY NATO
- * IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EEC
- * ELECTION OF A NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ASSEMBLY (NDA) ON A "ONE PERSON ONE VOTE" FRANCHISE FOR ALL CITIZENS AGED OVER 16. THE NDA MUST SUBMIT A NEW CONSTITUTION TO A VOTE WITHIN 12 MONTHS OF ITS ELECTION

(iv) This is a programme for national liberation in a revolutionary manner. Objectively it means destruction of the bourgeois repressive state apparatuses. It would mark the death of partition. Alongside the NLF/AIUF revolutionaries advance socialist and democratic struggles, refusing to 'postpone' them until the 'great day' of national liberation. In other words the process of permanent revolution as opposed to the reformist/stalinist death-trap of leaving socialism to the 'next stage'.

(v) In the best of circumstances this struggle can mean the formation of an AIWP. This will depend especially on acceptance of pluralism between parties being translated into pluralism within parties. That is the tradition of the Bolsheviks before Stalinization. Today pluralism within parties (the unconditional right to form factions and tendencies) is only systematically recognized by the statutes and practice of the Fourth International.

(vi) Without the NLF/AIUF framework the AIWP can at best be an abstract propaganda call. At worst it could lead to three fundamentally wrong options which must be ruled out

- 1 We can bypass the Republican movement
- 2 We can transform it into a workers' party
- 3 We want to split the republican movement and get a section to "come over to the working class"

With the AIUF/NLF framework the AIWP can gain flesh and blood. In any other circumstances the slogan is no good at all, antiquated, a dead dog.

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NOVEMBER 10 1984

- * the NLF/AIUF concept has parallels with the "Broad Front" perspective advocated by Séamus Costello in the mid-1970s.