

The INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST PARTY

An Introduction

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"We hold it to be our duty to assist and foster every tendency of organised labour in Ireland to found a Labour Party capable of fighting the Capitalist parties of Ireland upon their own soil."

(Connolly)

INTRODUCTION

The following pamphlet introduces the founding document of the Independent Socialist Party. It was around broad agreement on this document that the I.S.P. was formed.

Since at least 1968 Irish Socialists have been searching desperately for ways and means to spread the socialist message. There existed, thanks to the civil rights campaign masses of people, interested in solutions to their problems. Some socialists opted for working in the Peoples Democracy, then a militant civil rights student group, others joined Labour Parties, whilst others, especially after 1969, joined either wing of the Republican Movement.

Perhaps the one thing we all had in common was a simplistic view of what socialism was, and how it could be achieved. But very rapidly simplistic notions were abandoned as the reality of the political situation became clear. The 1969 pogroms, the 1971 Internment swoops, the massive resistance after Bloody Sunday, the rise of the Loyalist paramilitaries and the inadequacies of the Provos, and now the bourgeois backed Peace Movement are all events which have forced socialists to take stock of their views. We have. Which is why we are in the I.S.P.

As a result of experiences and analysis of the social conditions as well as the historical experiences of class struggle we reject elitism, whether of the Republican or Leninist variety. The working class is

relatively educated and literate and therefore can be approached openly with socialist ideas in ways not available to socialists in the past. We firmly believe that socialists have to sink deep roots in the working class movement to prevent elitism emerging. For elitism leads eventually to the divorcing of the struggle from the peoples needs.

At the same time we realise the importance of building a revolutionary party which will not succumb to backward prejudices of the working class. In attempting to build the revolutionary party we will work with all sections of progressive and socialist thought. The political situation is so serious for the left that we socialists cannot afford sterile sectarianism or internecine feuding. That only works in the interests of Imperialism.

We do, however, welcome constructive criticisms and dialogue. The Independent Socialist Party will be publishing policy documents and statements which we hope will be the culmination of intensive debate within the Irish Left. We believe the socialist left in Ireland has too easily neglected theory for the superficial attractions of instant action.

We hope the year 1977 will see the beginnings of theoretical clarity which will enable giant strides to be taken in developing the revolutionary consciousness of the Irish working class.

By. THE POLITICAL EXECUTIVE OF THE
INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST PARTY.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Socialism is international in outlook. The development of the world capitalist economy has broken down many national barriers in the quest for profits. Capitalism is no respecter of national rights. The attempts by the U.S.A. to subjugate the small nation of Vietnam is a clear example of this.

Those opposed to the exploitative capitalist system must recognise a common identity, a common fight with the exploited of the world. And it is a fight. To transform this world needs revolution. There is no case in history of a ruling class peacefully handing over power.

Revolution itself is not one single act. It is a continuous uninterrupted process whereby the economic, social and cultural relationships, in short the totality of human relationships - are transformed.

Social revolution is a conscious revolution by the working class to end class struggle by the abolition of class itself.

Under capitalism there is a continuing conflict between social and economic relationships. This holds back human development, creates artificial division within human society, alienates man from his true essence and could, through nuclear war, lead to the destruction of mankind itself.

Social revolution alone on a global scale is the only way forward for mankind. When the working class, conscious of its tremendously important historical role, sets out to fulfil its destiny, mankind will take a giant step to freedom.

PARTY AND CLASS

Unfortunately, not all members of the working class recognise the importance of resolving the class struggle. Trade Unions are the main form through which the working class organises itself. At best, trade unions act as defensive mechanisms of the class, at worst they can act as policemen for the bourgeoisie in the realm of industrial relations.

It is necessary for the more conscious elements of the class to combine together in a revolutionary party. That party is the subjective expression of the working

class. On a global scale objective conditions are ripe for revolution, Subjective conditions are not. It is the duty of conscious revolutionaries to help build the subjective factor- the revolutionary- without which the class cannot be free.

ANTI IMPERIALIST

Any socialist party in Ireland worthy of the name revolutionary must also be anti imperialist. Although imperialism is global and is an international system, one cannot wage a general struggle against it internationally without specific action in individual countries. We socialists in Ireland cannot fight the struggles of all the oppressed peoples of the world.

Although we give them general support, we cannot help free them if we cannot free ourselves. We are workers here in Ireland. So we fight against exploitation here, from an internationalist, not a nationalist perspective. We recognise the importance of building and creating links between organised sections of the international working class movement to oppose capitalism and imperialism.

THE UNRESOLVED NATIONAL QUESTION

Imperialisms presence constitutes the National Question. Its form is different due to uneven historical development, in the two separate states in Ireland. Nevertheless its effect is apparent. Until imperialism is finally defeated in Ireland there will remain the unresolved National Question.

That question for socialists is posed most strongly around.

1. The subjugation of the Northern Catholics in the six county state.
2. The continuing division of the Irish people, which causes all-class alliances to be formed within Republican and Loyalist sections, preventing the emergence of a separate working class unity and consciousness and...

3. The exploitation and underdevelopment of Irish economic resources.

Only by posing the national question in these terms, and not in terms of simply removing the border, do socialists begin to pose the correct revolutionary strategy. There can be no victory in an anti-imperialist movement which suppresses, hides or distorts class war, for by doing so, one effectively ties the workers to one or another set of capitalists. Effectively that is what Republicanism has been doing throughout its history with anti-imperialism. It has identified it with an isolationist and chauvinist capitalist class.

Republicanism in practice has felt it unwise to alienate substantial sections of the Irish bourgeoisie. It seeks an all-class alliance. During the War of Independence in 1918-21 it was Republicans who dampened down class struggles and said 'labour must wait'. Once the native capitalists had achieved the desired goal of limited political independence - for themselves - their interest in the unresolved national question was minimal. At the same time the capitalists in the Northern state ensured the continued fragmentation of the working class by the cynical promotion of sectarianism.

Today capitalism in Ireland is pro-imperialist. Only the working class i.e. those who have to by hand or brain exchange their labour power for the means to live - have an objective interest in fighting imperialism - for by doing so they are developing class struggle. Republicanism can make no permanent appeal to the working class. Most Irish workers were born and bred in a partitioned country. Their problems they see as directly related to the state in which they live. Cork workers will be hard put to tie up their housing problems with the sectarian murders in Belfast.

Thus a major priority for socialists is to forge links between all aspects of workers problems. That this priority exists and needs to be spelt out is a damning indictment of the Irish left since the death of James Connolly. It is true that some groups say there is a need to link class and national questions but they either succumb to the idealistic romanticism of

Republicanism or pander to the economic instincts of sections of the class in a rigid mechanist doctrinairism that they attempt to pass off as Marxism.

MARXISM AND REPUBLICANISM

Marxism is a dialectical method which not only interprets history and analyses modern society but also makes history. Its importance lies in this praxis of theory and action. Marxism is an intellectual weapon which the working class can use to show the historical, ephemeral nature of the bourgeoisie. Thus armed intellectually, the class becomes armed physically.

Marxism is growing in Ireland. Small but significant groups of workers are beginning to see their oppression, not as isolated phenomena, but as part of a totality. Marxism provides the key to the understanding of man in his environment. With that understanding men take their first conscious steps towards freedom.

Freedom for all mankind is the goal. History defines our task as building a socialist society in Ireland. The movement without reference to the goal means nothing for the working class. When the movement becomes an end in itself then revolutionary class struggle stands betrayed. In practice this means in whatever struggle socialists are involved in, they themselves are able to see that that struggle, and the demands rising from it, are but means to an end - that the political consciousness of the class is being continually raised. Always and ever questions of power - who rules - are raised - and answered.

Republican validity in so far as it has any validity as a revolutionary creed, is that it has struggled against imperialism. Indeed it seems to have been the main if not the only force to do so. Consequently socialists have been forced into taking positions either for or against defence of Republican armed

struggle. But socialists should not confuse strategy and tactics. In principle it is correct to struggle against Imperialism. But that does not mean justification, or defence of the methods used by Republicanism. On the contrary, if socialists believe in what they profess to believe then surely the main task is not abstract defence or criticism of Republicanism but instead positive leadership in the anti-imperialist struggle. Only when anti-imperialism is seen as not necessarily being synonymous with Republicanism will the masses flock to the anti-imperialist banner and Cork and Belfast workers will stand shoulder to shoulder in common cause.

To say this is not to simply dismiss Republican fighters. On the contrary, we hold these fighters in high esteem. Their self sacrifice, dedication and courage are an example to all revolutionary fighters throughout the world. These fighters must be won away from the dead end of Republican ideology. That cannot be done by side-line criticism or pointing out other methods. Revolutionary socialists have got to do if there is to be any prospect of wooing working class militants towards revolutionary socialism and away from Republicanism. Only by fully participating in the resolving of the national question can the small forces of Marxism hope to win the working class towards socialism.

IRELAND

Ireland is divided into two parts and it has both the features of a colonial and an industrialised country. In one part, the North, the economy has been integrated into the British economy. The British retain direct imperialist control of the North. They have tolerated the Unionist bourgeoisie which used all the trappings of state and economic power to oppress within their territory the dispossessed descendants of the native Irish population. The descendants of the Planter population were tied to the Unionist bourgeoisie by various processes. The Protestant religion helped to identify them with a British culture, unlike the

Catholic Irish. Socially, the Orange Order helped to prevent too much contact with Catholics. Economically, Of course, the Unionist bourgeoisie reinforced their historically privileged position by providing them with marginally better jobs, houses and social conditions, thus giving Protestant workers a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

Sectarianism thus has been a major weapon in this armoury of Imperialism. It has emphasised differences, alienated Catholic from Protestant worker and generally acted as a poison in the body of Irish political life.

Its ultimate destruction is dependant upon destroying the power basis of the Unionist bourgeoisie. The destruction of the Stormont regime is but a step towards that because ultimately the Unionist bourgeoisie can only be destroyed when imperialism is finally smashed.

In the South, the bourgeoisie, although politically claiming to be free and sovereign have failed to create an independent national economy. Instead, after a period of industrialisation, they have allowed the Irish economy to become more and more integrated into the British economy. Imperialist control and ownership has deeply penetrated the 26 county economy attracted by comparatively low labour costs and a relatively educated labour force. Emigration, has for a long time solved the problem of rural under-employment and the Roman Catholic Church's ideology has been a powerful force in helping suppress class struggle. Its reactionary ideology, especially regarding the role of women in society needs to be thoroughly exposed.

IRISH CAPITALISM

No significant section of the Irish Capitalist class, therefore, has any interest in resolving the national question. On the contrary, they welcome and encourage imperialist intervention in Ireland. It is true that for

a time a section of Irish capitalism found itself in opposition to British Imperialism, even to the extent of supporting armed resistance to British rule in Ireland. Not to allow leadership to pass to the working class movement, with their own consequent destruction

Subsequently Irish capitalism achieved its own limited objectives - state power with which to build protective barriers in order that native capitalism could flourish. For them the revolution was over - the national question was resolved. Of course there was the 'Northern problem' to be used occasionally to whip the masses into supporting the national leaders, the bourgeoisie. And of course Southern Capitalists were in conflict with Northern Capitalists who wanted free access to the British market.

But capitalism itself has an internal logic which transcends the subjective desires of individual and native capitalists - the big fish want the little - a permanent law of capitalism is the concentration of capital accompanied by the proletarianisation of part of the bourgeoisie class by a small number of bourgeois.

Having finally established itself in Ireland, capitalism found it necessary for its own development to open up to the world market. The 26 county economy became an important market for Imperialism, with a corresponding decline in the importance of the Northern market. In the interests of economic regionalisation, it became necessary to resolve outstanding political differences within the Irish bourgeoisie. Hence British Government pressure to reform the northern state and end latent southern sympathy for Republicanism.

That the Southern regime is only too anxious to crush the IRA is not an indication of total subservience to foreign power. It is in their own interests, It is not a master-servant relationship between Britain and the 26 counties - rather it is that of senior to junior partner. There is thus a complex relationship of economic, political and cultural ties between Ireland and Britain that precludes the possibility of an all class

alliance developing in Ireland in opposition to imperialism.

On the other hand the changing relationships between Ireland and Britain has had profound effects on the hitherto monolithic Unionist population. There, the emergence of at least five separate Unionist parties, all claiming to be the real Unionists, is solid evidence of the break up of the all class Unionist alliance. Clear class differences have emerged in the Unionist population. To prevent the re-establishment of a sectarian state in the North, anti-imperialists have got to ensure that the unionist class alliance remains forever broken. no concessions must be made to the reactionary ideology of loyalist workers, who have been psychologically and economically exploited in the interests of imperialism and the Northern bourgeoisie.

Instead a clear working class anti-imperialist strategy needs to be developed, which will show that the interests of all workers lies in the crushing - not the condoning of - Imperialism.

THE IRISH WORKING CLASS

The Irish working class has never consciously, as a class, thrown its weight wholeheartedly into the resolving of the National question. Individually, many workers have suffered the supreme sacrifice in the pursuit of Irish freedom. But that freedom they saw in essentially political terms, to be attained by British political withdrawal from the six north eastern counties. Unable to fully grasp the totality of imperialist control in Ireland, these workers used only the methods of militarism and consequently were unable to mobilise their classes as a class. Indeed the Irish working class have maintained a distrust for the emotional nationalism of the Republican ideology. They see it as having nothing to offer them. Experience has been a bitter teacher.

Following the alliance between socialists and Republicans that lead to the 1916 uprising Irish workers found the leadership of the struggle being usurped by bourgeoisie

and petit bourgeois elements. Sporadic manifestations of class warfare in the War of Independence were quickly suppressed by bourgeois elements and the Irish working class, leaderless and demoralised, stepped back from the National struggle, Instead they settled for essentially a defensive attitude which has finally culminated in the party founded by James Connolly, participating in coalition which prosecutes those who commemorate their founder. They saw the Civil War as a war between two sets of bourgeois fighting over the symbols of power and refused, as a class, to participate.

In the North, the existing sectarian divisions in the working class lead the Trade Union Movement to adopt a passive role and accept the sectarian set up. Working class unity will not be built by passivity. A more active militant and consciously political trade unionism needs to be developed.

Essentially, the problem of the Irish working class has been its failure to develop a critical class consciousness, which in turn reflects on the failure of revolutionary groups to pose the correct questions in order to encourage such consciousness. There is a healthy revolutionary tradition, albeit a republican one. There is a tremendous experience of struggle, both armed and mass, since 1968, in all parts of Ireland and there is increasing recognition by many sections of the class of the long term ill-effects of continued Imperialist presence in Ireland.

But there is not a revolutionary party, steeped in the working class movement, with a firm marxist ideology providing working class leadership in resolving the National question.

The creation of such a party is our goal.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

A party cannot be built in isolation from workers struggles. Self appointed leaders can never hope to lead the masses to victory from an ivory tower. As

Marx says "the emancipation of the working class must be won by the working class themselves". We reject the concept of socialism as being something brought into the proletariat's struggle from outside. Socialism is the ideology of the working class born out of that class's experiences. Socialist awareness is reached by struggle and reflections on these struggles. This consciousness is found in the foremost ranks of the working class. This advanced section, grouped in a party raises the consciousness of the rest of the class and also learns from the experience of the class. The party in short, provides the leadership. But it is a leadership grouped, not in individuals, but in the collective will of the advanced class. The relationship between class and party is dual, each learning from the other, consequently involving wider and wider sections of the class in struggle. Struggle not for itself but for socialism. And fundamental for that struggle is the necessity for truth. The revolutionary party cannot afford to sow illusions in the class. Consequently the party must spell out the truth and continually involve the workers in reaching that truth. Self criticism is essential if mistakes are to be rectified.

And if self criticism is to flourish then internal democracy is a pre-requisite for the proletarian party. In Ireland in the past, parties, defining themselves as socialist have gone to extreme lengths to stifle internal discussion. We reject their internal methods.

Revolutionaries have nothing to fear from free debate and ideas.

Once one begins to stifle internal dissent in a party then one is but a short step from the Dictatorship of the Central Committee and from that to the cult of personality.

We believe in the establishment of socialist democracy, consequently we believe in the broadest democratic discussion within the party. It is true that there are many erroneous ideas prevalent within the working class. Bourgeois and capitalist ideas are rampant. Many so called leaders of the class in the Trade Union Movement

are unable to grasp the totality of class struggle, and attempt to sell capitalist solutions to the workers. These ideas can be opposed by continuing debate, both within the class and party, and by raising the consciousness of the class.

Irish socialists have a tremendous task in persuading the class of the validity of socialist ideas, methods and practice. That task will not be made easier by the refusal of socialists to test their ideas in class struggle.

Socialism in Ireland has been weak, and until now unable to stand on its own feet. With the death of James Connolly ended the attempt to popularise Marxism within the class. Instead socialism became so akin to Republicanism, or else degenerated into mere reformism, that it became indistinguishable from either. Small sects of socialists saw their role as commentators on the class struggle, confident that history would prove them right. But history bypassed them. As Marti, the Cuban revolutionary said, "the best way of telling is doing".

It is the crucial inter-relationship between socialist theory and practice that points the way forward for the working class militants. Marxists and socialists have to step from the shadows and test their ideas in the heat of the class struggle. One cannot combat erroneous ideas and actions by remaining a passive spectator

There is massive unemployment North and South of the border. There is rampant inflation effectively cutting the living standards of the working class. There is increasing state repression North and South. The recent emergency legislation in the South is a clear indication of the Southern capitalists desire not merely to crush the Provos, but to stifle any working class hostility to Imperialism and Capitalism. Throughout Ireland, workers and militants despair of existing working class organisations. The Irish Labour Party, by its coalition capitulation to Fine Gael exposes itself as a willing collaborator with capitalism. Republican organisations show by their actions their separation from working class struggles and the influences of reformism. The existing

left wing groups are essentially peripheral to the struggles of the class.

Therefore we are building the ISP which we hope, basing itself on scientific socialist principle, will fight for the interests of the working class.

POSTSCRIPT

We hope that the many socialists who have emerged since 1968 will see their way to join us. Many have been disillusioned by the strategy of other organisations. Many have felt unable to support or join existing organisations. We believe the ISP can help stop the disillusionment and despair in the Irish Left. If you are in broad agreement with the ideas expressed in this pamphlet, join us. We welcome comrades with an open mind and a willingness to work for socialism. Whilst we may be critical of other groups it is our intention to work wholeheartedly for the unity of socialists and to co-operate with other groups. Criticisms and comments on this document, made in a comradely fashion, are very welcome.

JANUARY 1977.